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EUROPE TO LET

The Memoirs of an Obscure Man

STORM JAMESON

NEW YORK

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1940

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To

J. T. in Prague

In the hope that when the curtain
lifts again we shall see her

And to

Her great country, the country
of Masaryk and Beneš

Czechoslovakia

CONTENTS

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| THE YOUNG MEN DANCE | I |
| BETWEEN MARCH AND APRIL | 63 |
| THE HOUR OF PRAGUE | 107 |
| THE CHILDREN MUST FEAR | 225 |

THE YOUNG MEN DANCE

“What rough beast?”

“An Englishman. Allow me to introduce my friend, Herr Esk. Herr Esk, these over-excited gentlemen. Max von Holz. Otto Wiedemann. Lochner. Kapp-Schiller. Please sit. Don’t trouble to remember your school English, gentlemen. Herr Esk speaks German. He speaks French as well, but no doubt you will not put him to the trouble. The French—”

“Are swine. The English are not even swine; they are fools.”

The young German who had brought me into this cellar looked at me with a smile. It made me see that his lips were as bloodless as the rest of his skin. I don’t think he was delicate. It was a family trick. I saw later Vuillard’s portrait of his mother as a young woman—the same shapely colourless mouth, arched eyebrows, arched fine nose, the bones showing clearly as though it were a pity to miss the beauty of this scaffolding. Kurt Hesse had improved on his mother’s good looks: his forehead was wider under the thick fair hair. He was taller than the other tall young man in the place, the one called Holz. These two were clearly of good family, while the others were as clearly bourgeois. It

is impossible to guess whether Providence or the Germans themselves arranged that class differences should be so marked. Even now it is impossible for an outsider, a Ribbentrop, to pass as an aristocrat.

I had met Hesse four years ago, in Belgium—in November 1918. The company I was commanding caught up with him, retreating by himself with a wounded arm and a temperature of 104. He had been left by his unit, considered unfit to walk. Furious because he was a prisoner, he refused to admit that he knew any English until I began speaking to him in German. We became friends. He was younger than I was. He was eighteen. He had been at the front five months.

This was 1923—January. I was no longer a soldier. I was a writer, and I had chosen to come to Germany because I thought that Germany, starving, bankrupt, must have removed some, at least, of its filthy rags from truth. Heaven knows what I thought. I was running away. Here I was in Cologne, the son of my father, the master mariner, more noticeably of my mother. Like her, I am a peasant; my bones ache in a north wind; my fingers are long and square, with thick knuckles; I lie, waste money because I was brought up to hoard it, despise my betters, envy them. I ought never to have left that house with its six feet of garden, its shells marking the path to the door, its fuchsia, its wind-bitten may-tree. The war freed me from it. I should be a fool to run back. I am nothing there but my roots. Perhaps nothing will come of the effort I made to tear them out—I don't count on anything. I count on myself, only.

This cellar café must be well below the level of the Rhine. It is unheated, except by its eight or nine customers. Hesse's friends were waiting for him at a table at the farther

end. It is a round table but he appears to sit at the head of it. He placed me between himself and Holz.

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing. I have no business here, if that's what you mean."

"He means he has no more money than the rest of us, he's not one of our conquerors, he doesn't know the British Commissioner by sight. In brutal fact, he's nobody. He saved my life one night in 1918."

"Nonsense," I said.

"Oh, were you in the war?" Holz asked. He had been looking, with his grey eyes, cold, bright, at a point somewhere in my skull: he brought them to the level of my eyes: I saw that he was as young as Kurt Hesse, but, like his, Holz's youth was sullenly waiting to spring.

"Of course," I said irritably.

The young man called Wiedemann laughed. He was sitting at the other side of Hesse, lolling back, his legs crossed. He was very slight; he had the body of a schoolboy. His face was as thin and narrow as a rat's, with an extraordinary air of intelligence and brutality.

"Why of course?" he said insolently. "We were told the English didn't fight, they stayed at home and made money, as the Jews did with us."

"Otto, Otto, little Otto," Hesse said. "Now tell us where you fought."

Tears sprang into Otto's eyes. The skin stretched over his cheekbones twitched like a nervous illness.

"Right! Make fun of me. Sneer. You know I can't defend myself!"

He broke down completely and began to snivel. Holz patted his shoulder.

"Cheer up," he said, smiling, "you ought to know Kurt better."

"I'm sorry," Hesse said gravely. "But you really mustn't insult guests, even when they're English."

"Especially the English," Kapp-Schiller said. "We must put up with them because they're not French."

Twelve days since the French had marched into the Ruhr. Hate of them, which had fed for four years on insults, arrests, deportations, ran through the whole of the Rhineland like the shock of a scald. Every nerve-centre was jarred, the veins throbbed, every man thought of murder and every woman of being raped. I had come into Cologne through Bonn, which was occupied by the French, and seen the hatred onto which life in that city looked. The French there were like people living in a house of which the windows look over a slaughter-yard; ignoring the fear, pain, rage that touched them, they kept up a civilised life behind blinds:

I watched Kapp-Schiller, fascinated. He was the young German of caricature, blond, ugly, with staring china-blue eyes, and without a back to his shaven head. He and Lochner were apart from the others; they were a year younger; both, I knew later, were the sons of tradesmen: only defeat and a revolution could have altered life so that they were sitting, drinking, with two landowners' sons, and with Wiedemann, who did not belong to any class. His mother was the daughter of an East Prussian landowner who married a schoolteacher; her relations ignored her until her husband died, then stepped gingerly in and sent the boy to the cadet school. He might have died there—he was weakly and intelligent—if Kurt Hesse had not protected him. No one could protect him from his own agonised sense of dis-

grace; he was ashamed of his name, of his mother's weakness, of his short sickly body. Secure because he was Hesse's friend, he used his tongue on the other cadets. No one understood why Hesse troubled with him, least of all Hesse's close friend, Max von Holz. Did Hesse understand it himself? Holz told him he was giving way to a perverse impulse to save something that other people despised. Perhaps, Hesse thought, he is right—then what am I? Like every youth of his generation, ill-fed, strained, the war waiting for him at the other side of a curtain, he asked himself a great many questions that no one was there to answer.

A week before the three were to join their regiment Wiedemann fell, breaking his ankle. He did not get to the front. He would always be a little lame.

This was the second time Kapp-Schiller had spoken about the French, looking as he spoke at Hesse. I remembered that Hesse had told me, the night I sat up with him in the kitchen of a Flemish farm, that he had a grandmother in France. He was off his head at the time, and I didn't know which of his talk was delirium and which true. It was not important.

He opened his eyes widely, with the curious effect that a light seemed to come through them from inside.

"If you are referring to the fact that an eighth part of me is French—" he said slowly.

"For pity's sake," Holz interrupted. "Let it alone. You, Kapp-Schiller, hold your tongue unless you have something sensible to tell us. We all know what the French are doing; talk won't help." He glanced at me. "How long have you been here? Three days. You haven't heard that the French are financing criminals, thieves, murderers they let out of the prisons, scoundrels of all sorts, to run a so-called Separatist movement." He drew his lips back. "Perhaps there

was a movement when we Rhinelanders would have left Germany, but not now. Not when Germany is down. Now when the swine are rooting in her for her heart. Not—" He stopped, his face still except for a muscle in each cheek. "Well, I tell you, if I were the Government I would make guns and bury them underground. I would arm, arm, arm, until the day when I could stand up and spit in the faces of our tormentors. That is what I should do." He smiled to himself. "They are all young men of sixty or so, our Government. I am old, I am almost twenty-three. I shall have to think of some way of impressing them with my greater wisdom and experience."

He looked at Hesse, who smiled. Both for an instant became young and natural, not strained. I saw that the one thing each believed in was the other's love. It took the place of security, pleasure, the self-confidence which inflates luckier young men than these born just in time to be defeated. Well—not all of us have as much luck as comes from having a friend.

I shivered. In spite of the narrowness of the room and its low ceiling, the cellar was icy cold. The walls, hung in the German style with shields, hunting-horns and boars' heads, were damp, as though the Rhine had sweated through four or five hundred feet of earth: the floor was bare stone; there was not a great deal to be said for the beer. A fireplace built to hold logs was empty. A four-year-old notice, signed by the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, had been pasted on the open chimney so that the first fire would destroy it.

Kapp-Schiller and Lochner were teasing Wiedemann. All three were studying at Bonn: to get there on the light railway they had to have passes countersigned by the French:

yesterday Wiedemann forgot his, he was stripped by the guard and made to hop on his sound foot until he dropped exhausted.

"It was a nasty trick," Lochner chuckled, "but you looked—I can't tell you what you looked like—naked and hopping."

"Like a plucked hen," Wiedemann said, "like your mother when she—"

"Enough," growled Lochner, "that's enough."

But Wiedemann, his face poked forward, impudently, capped one shocking joke about Lochner's female relatives with the next, until the young man sprang at him in a frenzy of hate. Holz and Hesse interfered. Wiedemann sat smiling and was left alone. The frenzy he had let loose did not go back obediently into the nerves and empty stomachs of the others; it ran about between their chairs like a dog. The dark pupils of Holz's grey eyes were dilated. Kapp-Schiller drummed with his hard fingers on the table, a maddening repeated phrase, the echo of a pulse in his brain. Only Kurt Hesse appeared calm, or calm enough. His head bent, he stared thoughtfully at the table, at his two hands resting on the edge. I began to want to get out of this cold place. I am always uneasy among animals.

"We need a revolution," Lochner said abruptly. "The last was a flop. Why? Because it went for the wrong things. The workers and Jews spoke. We did not speak. Look what they gave us! A country where everyone is hungry except the Jews. A Jew is buying up the houses in the street where I live. Ah!" He lowered his head. "We Nationalists could get rid of the Jews; we could each kill one, all over Germany, but what the devil are we to do with these old fools

who are supposed to govern us? They feel nothing. It matters to us that we can't marry, but they died up years ago; they don't feel. We must get rid of them too, I say."

"Before anything else," Holz said gently, "we need a policy. Before your energy is any use. We must know what we want, then we can plan tactics and strategy. We need—"

Kapp-Schiller clattered his hands on the table.

"We need something we can serve," he cried. "All this Jewish talk about freedom is part of their trickery. You must be free, they say; you must have opinions; you must argue. Idiots that we are, we listen. We argue, and while we argue they steal our jobs, our houses, the blood out of our heads. No one must be allowed to argue! Everyone must hear the same word. Everyone must obey and serve." His flat blue eyes shone. "I want to dedicate myself!"

"But freedom—" I began.

"Excuse me, I am speaking about freedom," he said in a jeering voice. "You English don't know what it means. Who is free? Only the soldier. He is fed, clothed; he does what he is told. He has no responsibility except to his own courage. His honour. He is really free. That is the highest freedom. Perhaps only a German is fit for it."

I saw Holz glance uneasily at his friend. Hesse was listening with his slight smile. Its odd brilliance hung like a flag against his face.

"A charming idea," he said, smiling. "Who knew you were overflowing with epigrams, my dear fellow? The country a barracks, workmen sloping spades, clerks saluting with pens, women—what shall we do with our women?—make them deliver children by numbers? What the devil—why stop there? What are the only necessary items in the bill? Birth, copulation, and death. Concentrate on them,

teach them squad-drill. Dismiss children who are born on the wrong days, refuse to allow slackers to die—damn it, you can't have people dying whenever they like—"

"Kurt," Holz said quietly.

Crimson with anger, Kapp-Schiller stood up. His heavy petulant lower lip trembled and hung down like a child's, with a drop at the centre of it. Before he could speak, Holz said hurriedly:

"Kurt is right in his way. We're not slaves of the State because we are Nationalists—if we give our lives it's enough. We can believe what we choose."

"Nothing of the sort," Kapp-Schiller screamed. "We must all believe the same thing. I—I—" His voice changed and became appealing. "You don't mean that, Max. You're backing Hesse up because you—because he's your friend. It's because you told me things I could believe that I trust you. When you talk like this I—" his voice rose again—"I suffer."

Hesse got up slowly and began looking in his pocket.

"It was my turn to pay," he said pleasantly. He walked over to the bar at the end of the room behind which the proprietor was dozing with his head on his arms, and paid for the beer. Neither the proprietor nor the customers at the other tables had taken the least notice of Kapp-Schiller's screaming voice. No doubt they were used by now to the hysterical outbursts of young men. Hesse disappeared up the stone cellar steps. I hurried after him. He was my host, and I had no wish to be left with the others. Before I reached the top, Holz and Wiedemann caught me up. The last was still chuckling to himself, but the cold wind in the street made him gasp and huddle himself into his coat. He was the only one of the young men who wore an overcoat.

Max von Holz thrust his arm into Hesse's and they walked ahead of us in the dark narrow street. There were no lights in the houses and empty booths. I walked in a trench, nothing visible except the icy wind coming down like a sickle in front of my eyelids. Shutting my eyes for a minute to accustom them to the darkness, I heard the town shaping itself round me: the enormous mass of the cathedral—flying into it head on, its buttresses, gargoyles, galleries—gathered itself; the houses and streets emerged from the past, each livelier and fuller of meaning than the living flesh; and the river, the Rhine, that carrying stream of the nation, that vein.

After a minute's walking we emerged on the river, near the bridge-of-boats. Even leaning over it we could see nothing. The wind was low down, below heavy clouds; but looking up, I got the spires of the cathedral and the great curve of the other bridge full in the face.

"What a hideous bridge that Hohenzollern thing is," I said.

"The German soldiers retreated over it in December 1918," Max von Holz said. "Some of them threw their rifles into the Rhine. Into our Rhine. I saw children, little boys, dragging gun-carriages across it. They thought they were saving them from the English."

"What a waste of human energy!" Hesse said lightly. "I wouldn't lift a finger to save Krupp's guns for him."

"But if you were ordered to load and fire them against our enemies!"

"Who are our enemies?" said Hesse.

In the blackness beside me, apparently from under my elbow, little Wiedemann went off into a fit of laughter.

"He, he, he! If the others could hear you!"

"Shut your mouth," Holz said. Recovering his patience, he began to sing softly, *Fest steht und treu die Wacht, die Wacht am Rhein.*

Kurt Hesse laughed.

"If you were in Bonn now you would be arrested," he said.

Wiedemann had invited me to his home. I accepted because I was afraid of hurting his feelings—not his, but the feelings of any German. I felt compunction. What waste, as Hesse would say, of human energy.

Wiedemann's mother lived in the upper part of her house: she had let the rest to an English official who paid his rent in sterling. No doubt he, too, felt foolishly guilty. Frau Wiedemann, I thought when I stepped in, must be an unusual woman: the rooms were not hideously overfurnished; the walls had been painted; there were light curtains under the dark winter ones; there were even flowers arranged in a superb copper pan. Fancy a German housewife with the imagination to use it. She came in, a stout shapeless woman with a moustache and an expression of girlish silliness. I felt that she was embarrassed. Had her son forgotten to tell her he had invited me?

"Your son—" I began.

"Ah, Otto," she said, simpering. "He will be here in a minute. He went out to post a letter. We expected you—that is, I expected you. Otto said, 'Bah, he won't come.' But I know what an Englishman is when he promises; my husband taught me to respect the English. I tell Otto he is wrong to despise them, but, poor boy, he has so many disappointments, and he so clever. What do you think, Herr Esk, would there be more chance for him in your country?"

Could you arrange for him to live there with friends—I am sure you must have rich friends?”

“Isn’t he studying at the university?” I said awkwardly.

“Poor boy, yes. But his professor is a Jew and he keeps Otto down in every way; he sneered at his poems and told him to read Heine—as if he needed to read anything! He has so much talent; he needs only encouragement, that’s all, that’s all. I’m sure you understand what I feel.”

She padded across the room, and began spoiling the arrangement of the flowers.

“Charming colours,” I said.

“Oh, do you think so?” She paused, doubtful. “Otto does them himself. He made me give him my preserving pan. It was my mother’s. He changed all the furniture, too. The rooms seem bare, but perhaps—”

“It’s the modern taste, Frau Wiedemann.”

“Of course, of course.” Her face brightened. “He’s wonderful, my Otto. If only he had recognition. You know, he writes, and sends things to the newspapers, but of course the editors are Jews—they pretend he knows nothing. One of these beasts even had the impudence to laugh at him. He—”

Frau Wiedemann broke off suddenly. Her face became blank, except for a rapid quiver of the eyelids. She forgot to keep up her embarrassing girlishness. The change in her was as disconcerting to watch as though her skirt had dropped off. She was staring past me at the door. I turned round. Her son had come in noiselessly. I had the impression—it must have been conveyed to me from Frau Wiedemann’s brain—that he had been standing outside the door for some moments.

“What has my mother been telling you about us?”

"Nothing, nothing, darling Otto. Nothing. Aren't you frozen? The wind's bitterly cold, I know. I'll order tea."

"Send it in, please."

Brushing her off as though she were a leaf, Otto shut the door on her. I said hurriedly:

"What a delightful room this is. Your mother gives you all the credit for it."

"Ah, you like it?"

"It's charming."

"I'll show you my room when we've had tea. The room I work in. I suppose mother's been telling you that my things are always rejected by editors. It's true. But I don't care, they won't defeat me, I shall make myself powerful. One of these days I shall have power, and I'll make them pay. You'll see. You don't believe me; you're smiling. But you wait, just you wait."

I soothed him by saying that every great man had to face difficulties in his youth. The more outrageously I flattered him the more of it he needed. I was ready to laugh with pity, but I went on, since actually I did not despise him. I disliked him, but he was too intelligent to be laughed at. He was sensitive; he suffered atrociously from the slights he imagined, as much as from those he received. Sometimes he would come home in tears and let his mother undress him and bathe him as she did when he was a child. In the morning he punished her for his weakness. He was always punishing his father through her, and the poor woman—whose few happy months had been those of her marriage—would weep bitterly and beg him to forgive her for it.

On the writing-table in his room he had a bust of Hegel. He held it up, pouting at it as though it were a mirror.

"Don't you think—a certain likeness?"

"Very," I said.

His stunted body, and the narrow top-heavy head, trembled with happiness.

"One of these days I, too, shall produce my *Philosophie des Rechts*. Or, perhaps better, I shall live it. One thing you can be sure of—I shall not fail." He struck his puny chest. "I have something here—flames—the sun. One day you will see it rise!"

His eyes filled with tears of pleased vanity.

Anxious to do something for Hesse, I enquired which was the best restaurant in Cologne and took him to dine there. It was crowded with Germans who were better able to spend money than I am. Evidently, I thought sullenly, I am making a fool of myself. But they were all middle-aged and elderly. Kurt Hesse was the only young German in the room. He ordered modestly. To cure my sullenness, and make sure I was doing him a favour, I ordered a bottle of Rüdesheim, at fabulous cost. Hesse raised his eyebrows. I seem to be behaving like a profiteer, I thought. I wanted to explain that, cheap as living in Cologne was for an Englishman, I had very little money in my pocket.

The food was disappointing, heavy, tasteless, sour. But the wine—I am heartsick when I remember it. It was full of life; it was strong, racy, delicate, a Mozart among wines. Only one other thing in the world gives me the nostalgic pleasure I feel when I read the name of a Rhine wine—the memory, poignant, incongruous, of my mother singing *At Ehren on the Rhine* in a clear voice above the noise of the sea wind and the wood spitting in the grate. Where can she have picked the song up?

"Can you see that fat fellow across there?" Hesse said. "His name is Schäffer; he is an official of a Trades Union. He is still able to eat here, though in the Ruhr a few hours away the workers are half starved. And do you know that the French deported five hundred yesterday? Ah, he's finished. Bursting. There, see, he's going to make a respectful remark to Falkhäuser before he leaves. You don't know Falkhäuser? He's one of our steel lords. He and Schäffer have been quarrelling officially for weeks, but you see how humble the workers' leader is now, how respectable and modest. And Falkhäuser scarcely troubles to look at him. I tell you, my dear chap, that wretched dull fellow, that so-called leader, that democrat, will take the heart out of the German workers in—ten years, I give him ten years. Ten years from now there won't be a kick left in the workers. Damn it, I can't look at him. Talk of something else."

"I think you told me you had a French grandmother?"

Hesse smiled.

"Only a year before the war—I was thirteen—I stayed with her. She lives in Bourg-sur-Gironde. I still dream that I am living in the house. It stands above the river in an old square: shabby, forgotten. Mothers fetch their children to sit gossiping under the lime-trees planted in the gravel of the square between the church and the wall of the cliff-top. An endless flight of stone steps led down to the wharfs on the Gironde. It made me dizzy to look down. My grandmother is called Julie de St Ciers. I think she was handsome but I have forgotten. What I remember is the warmth, the scent of the limes, an eagle high overhead, and a boy shouting from a boat near the wharf. There was something—in-describable—it is France, I suppose—something old, secure,

shabby, indifferent. How well they know how to live, those Frenchmen. How sure they are of themselves. How mean, and greedy, and magnificent."

"They are sure of France," I said.

"I suppose that is 'it.'" His face became dull, exactly as though some liquid under the skin curdled, or as though he could squeeze the light out of it. "We're not sure enough of anything, we Germans."

"Why didn't you stick to music and fairy-tales?" I had drunk enough to forget to be civil.

He laughed.

"How sentimental you were about us in those days," he said gaily.

"Well, what do you want now?"

"I? I want nothing. I'm not sorry to be alive—this wine, for example, is worth a good many disappointments—but sincerely I don't care whether Germany lives or not. No, that's a lie." He spoke quietly. "Perhaps the drop of French blood in me is all eyes. Or I may have dreamed about Germany when I was in Bourg—just as I dream now of the Gironde. What I see of the future makes me prefer to live a little every day. Only a little. It is part of the German damnation that we exaggerate everything. Everything. Our griefs, our misfortunes—to listen to us, you'd think no country had suffered before, that there had never been a Dark Age—our virtues. Really, it's extraordinary. If we hadn't given birth to the sanest human being since Socrates—I mean Goethe, and you see that even I am boasting—I should say we had a touch of insanity. Cracked, you know. You heard Kapp-Schiller talking about his higher freedom. The poor devil is absolutely sincere; he doesn't know better. He doesn't understand freedom. His light, you know, is dark-

ness. God knows why we Germans have no self-respect. And yet I believe we are good. We are not mean, you know."

"I should like," I said, "to order another bottle of this wine."

"Why not?—if you have the money."

"I have very little money. But I have always lived poorly; I have missed a great deal. This wine of yours is among the few perfect things in the world."

"Yes."

The wine came. I filled his glass and my own.

"To the future!"

"To your future," Hesse said, laughing. "I told you I preferred the present."

"Tell me about Wiedemann," I said, "I spent an hour with him yesterday. He is cracked, certainly."

Polite as he was, Hesse never listened to anyone—except to Max von Holz—with more than half his mind. It whisked round when he was addressed—you caught a glimpse of it like a glimpse of a woman's dress behind a curtain—listened for a minute, answered sometimes mischievously and turned back. When I spoke Wiedemann's name he came close enough to give me the whole of his attention. Wiedemann may have baffled him, too.

"I am sorry for him," he said simply. "He hates me; he hates everyone. He pities himself religiously. He imagines he must save himself all the time from being crushed by other people. He wants money, too. If I had any I would give it to him. Even pity ought to pay its way now."

"I can't see why you should be sorry for people."

"You are like Max," Hesse said, smiling. "He pretends to despise pity. We Germans are either sentimental or brutal.

We can't accept life as a sculptor accepts a lump of stone, or even politely. We always make a fuss. So we fail to notice that the pity is in life, without anyone needing to put it there. I believe we once knew it. Something went wrong in the German mind during the sixteenth century. It divided and one half sold itself to the devil. I must, you know, be drunk. It's a long time since I ate and drank here."

"I would order another bottle," I said, "but I can't afford it."

"No, it would be a pity. What is the English phrase? Enough is as good as a feast. How like the English. How simply and unbearably like you." He touched my arm lightly. "Forgive me. You know I have enjoyed our meeting."

I came back to Cologne in May. Hesse, I found, had moved. His salary as a bank clerk no longer stretched to a decent room, and he was living in an attic over a tobacconist's shop near the barracks. A staircase led to it from the back of the shop. When the place was shut for the evening the only way to reach Hesse's room was by a flight of wooden steps from a yard at the back; to reach the yard you had to walk the length of an alley running behind the street.

There was only one part of the room where Hesse could stand upright. It was hot and airless under the roof, impossible to sit there in the evening.

I sat with him and Holz under the trees in an open-air café near the Ring, or on the Ring—I have forgotten. It was warm, the sun lying across the top of the trees like a green, dazzlingly bright snake. An extraordinary glow came off the leaves each time the snake moved. There was a young

woman, a prostitute, waiting outside in the street; it was clear that she had not learned her business; she stood with her head hanging down; when a man came near her she gave him a wide timid smile, like a servant-girl standing aside for him to pass.

"She won't go far."

"She didn't need to," Hesse said. "I know about her; she worked in a bookshop, and she became bored with it a week ago and started this."

"Something must be done," said Holz, "to stop the rot that has begun among boys and girls of her age."

"Nonsense. She is weak-minded."

"So you're not sorry for her?" I said, smiling.

Hesse's mouth twitched. "They call it learning to live. It's quite senseless and involuntary. If someone—Max or someone else—began a movement for poverty and obedience they would turn joyfully to that. I tell you—we overdo things."

Holz had a newspaper, with an account of the Communist riots at Gelsenkirchen. He began reading it aloud. The French had encouraged the rioters. Why? To alarm the German authorities. Holz threw down the paper and told me in a voice almost inaudible from hatred that the French sent troops to evict the families they were deporting. Innocent people were shot, a clerk and his sweetheart, a child. The French officers used their riding-whips on any person, man, woman, child, who failed to leap off the pavement quickly.

"You see?" he said, speaking into my face. I dislike being so close to a feeling. At the moment he was nothing else, a pure feeling of hate. "You see how they treat us. I have a cousin in Dortmund. Last week one of his workers was

thrashed, a man almost a cripple. When the French control visited his factory my cousin wrote on a slate: 'Excuse me, I can't speak to men who thrash unarmed people.' He was arrested. He was right. We should hate them and make them feel it by silence."

I shifted my chair. Hesse was watching his friend; he felt—I am certain he felt it—my distaste for an emotion which is able to dramatise itself as a victim. But he objected to my criticising his friend. I could see him leaning back from me, almost as though his skull withdrew behind the skin.

"They behave badly because they have put themselves in the wrong," he said softly.

"No. Because they are afraid of us."

"You are deaf and blind," Hesse said. "You don't know what the real French are like. On the Gironde they're not thinking of us; they think as we do, of our vines, of the traffic on the river, of sleeping at night with a woman, of the means of eating and drinking, of a child. They think clearly, narrowly. They despise enthusiasm. All, even the political swine, even a writer like Gide, are peasants. Yes, if you know them you—"

Holz laughed. He laughed with the greatest good-temper and kindness.

"My dear Kurt," he said tenderly, "if I didn't know you I should be accusing you of God knows what. As it is, you can be anything you like. I do my best to like everything you feel like being."

A man passed us and sat down alone at a table. I saw people glance at him. Holz saw him and jumped up. He spoke in his usual voice to the head waiter who was standing near our table.

"Do you, does the management allow disreputable people to come in here?"

The waiter made an almost imperceptible gesture of contempt and embarrassment.

"You know how it is," he said in a low voice.

Holz hesitated.

"Sit down, Max," said Hesse quietly.

Holz sat down. I noticed that he was calm. The anger with which he talked about the French had left him. He looked only disgusted, as though his glass had been dirty.

"Who is it?" I said.

"He comes over from Bonn. He's one of the Separatist pack the French encourage and protect. He ran a brothel in Hamburg until the inflation destroyed his profits. Now the French pay him better."

"Personally I should hang them," Hesse said gently, "and leave them hanging."

Holz nodded to me. "You see there are limits to Kurt's tolerance," he said cheerfully.

"What else can you do with vermin?" Hesse said. He took a leaf from the tree behind his chair and began to dissect it, leaving the strongest veins intact. "I used to do this for my mother," he said. "She pressed the skeletons between silk and made lampshades from it. A ridiculous game. It's extraordinary to think that scores of them are still there, being used, and she is dead."

We left, and walked to the harbour. A two-masted Dutch barque was there. I have seen its fellow a hundred times in the harbour at home. Really, it is absurd to come so far, with such labour, giving up the sounder half of one's life, to see the same ship getting ready for the same voyage.

A keen regret chilled me; what might I have become if I had had the courage to stay on my own side of the North Sea, to swallow salt with my bread, to work obscurely, allow one valley, one hill, one quay slippery with age, to cut themselves into my brain? What fool do I think I am? As though anything on which I have looked since, any noble or exquisite scene, could cut deeper. As though when I am dying I shall not taste salt.

We turned to go back to Hesse's room. A young woman hurrying along by the river stood still and waited for us to come. When we reached her I saw that she was very young, not more than seventeen. She had a round face, pale, with a narrow chin, and eyes the colour and shape of a kitten's. She stood in front of us with a sly dignity, awkwardly, like a schoolgirl.

"Sophie, what are you doing here?" Holz said. He said coldly to me: "Allow me to present you to my cousin, Fräulein von Marbach." He did not trouble to tell her my name.

"Mamma sent me to buy her mending wool," Sophie said gaily.

"At this time in the evening?"

"But we buy it from Aunt Hilde! You know she keeps a shop now." She began laughing. It was no different from any young girl's laugh and yet it made me smile. It was extraordinarily fresh and naïve, without any of the second thoughts of a woman. "She unlocked the door for me. You never saw such confusion. She could never, you know, Max, keep even her lace handkerchief in its place, and now when she sells anything she throws the rest on to the floor or into a corner. The shop looks like a hay-field in a wind."

Although she spoke to all of us, a well-mannered child,

she looked at Holz. He clearly felt himself responsible for her; more than that, he was deliberately, half anxiously, possessive. A trace of colour had come under his dark skin, under his cheekbones. He was younger and more self-assured, as though he had discovered one thing he could do without bitterness. His grey eyes smiled truthfully at the eyes of the young girl.

"I shall take you home," he said gently.

Sophie blushed.

"Are you sure you can spare the time?" she said. She looked timidly at Kurt Hesse.

"Now, now, Sophie," Hesse said, laughing, "you know you're not really afraid. You put on that meek and mild face to get sympathy. Tch, run away."

They are like brothers and a sister, I thought. When Holz and Sophie had gone, I said this.

"Yes," said Hesse reflectively. "I am fond of her. She is ignorant, charming, narrow, with nothing in her mind but—well, what does a girl of her age think? I suppose she is like a child: she has a few squalid thoughts and the rest innocent and trivial. And she can suffer horribly one minute and the next burst out laughing. Max is in love with her; he would marry her tomorrow if he had enough money to keep both of them and her mother. They live on her father's pension; he was a general, which is enough now to keep them in bird seed. But some day she and Max will marry. I hope so. She is a good child."

He felt certain she would not take Holz from him; she would comfort him, and give him children, but not friendship.

"If I married I should want someone not so unspoiled," he said. He frowned. "It is too much responsibility. Now-

adays one wants less, not more, of that. I won't allow anyone to think for me, but I don't want to have to think for others. Especially not for a woman. Let her think her thoughts and leave mine alone."

We had reached his room. The tobacconist, who kept his shop open until he chose to go home, was locking the door. He unlocked it to let us walk through. We went upstairs. It was darker in the attic than outside. The skylight, propped open, let in a little light and no air. There was nothing in the room except the bed, two chairs, a table, Hesse's books stacked up neatly against a wall, and the box in which he kept his clothes. On the table lay a folded sheet of paper and a note. "*I came at the time you said. Here is the manifesto. I shall try to come back. O.W.*"

Hesse looked up with an embarrassed smile.

"Poor Otto. Now he'll be certain I meant to snub him. Perhaps I did—since I shouldn't have forgotten anyone else. But I believe, you know, that I forgot. Max was going to be here to meet him. He has forgotten, too. That poor angry, neurotic devil."

"May I read it?" I said. I picked up the manifesto and held it without looking at it.

"So far as I am concerned," Hesse said indifferently. "Perhaps you'd better read it before they come. It's not my plot, you know. I don't believe in violent changes. Far better let things work themselves out. Keep your energy—to use for yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"I think," Hesse said. He sighed. "I think," he repeated, "it must take every ounce of strength a man has now to resist the machine. Society has become one immense greedy stupid machine, without a heart, without intelligence, with-

out humour. How is a man ever to be himself, to be alone? He has to work for the machine. He has to let it feed and clothe him. Unless he is careful he will grow to love it. He will embrace it and give it his seed. Instead of rushing about conspiring, against the French, against the Separatists, against employers or Communists or Jews, one should be turning one's soft flesh to bone and gristle. The harder, the more self-contained one is, the less chance there is for the machine." He looked at me with his slight brilliant smile. "I talk at you, you know, because you're a foreigner. You should shut me up."

He lit the gas. An unshaded jet sprang at the point of an iron bracket.

"If I had only thought to keep one of my mother's ghostly museum pieces!"

I glanced through Wiedemann's manifesto. It began: "Comrades! You are being tricked. In disgusting alliance with the Jews and other traitors the French intend to destroy you." It went on in this way, becoming more inconsequent and violent, and sillier. I put it down.

"It seems complete nonsense," I said.

"I'm sure it is."

He bent down, to read it without taking it into his hand. Distaste and mischief crossed and re-crossed his face. I watched him. I am beginning to realise that my task is to watch. I should like to be an original, but in fact I am nothing except the possessor of peasant senses.

"Poor Otto," he said again in a low voice. "My brother when we were children used to keep rats in a pit with a net over it. He called it his bear-pit. I spent an hour watching one of them race up and down, biting when he could, as vicious and as pitiful a sight as you've seen. Poor Otto!"

I heard knocking somewhere. Hesse went out on to the narrow landing—it was a passage—and opened the door at the end leading to the outside staircase. Wiedemann came in, grumbling.

"Why do you live in such a hole? At least, can't you get a key to the shop door and save your visitors from having to feel their way along a lane filled with rubbish and climb these wretched tumbledown steps?"

"I'm sorry, old chap."

"Or you could be in when one calls."

Wiedemann was lamer than usual this evening. He limped to the bed and let himself fall on it with an air of exhausted suffering. I suspected—as was true—that he did it to get sympathy.

"The truth is," Hesse said kindly, "I forgot what time I had asked you and Max to come. It's abominable of me. You must forgive me."

"I forgive you; I forgive you," Wiedemann said irritably. He looked at me. "What is he doing here?"

"He is my friend, Otto."

"Why have a friend who is not one of us?" Wiedemann said, with an impudent smile.

"Dear me," said Hesse. "What makes you think I am one of you?"

Wiedemann did all he could to keep his air of impudence. He lolled, with his feet up, on Hesse's bed, and began whistling. His glance kept turning to his manifesto lying on the table. He was dying to know what Hesse thought of it.

Holz came in.

Wiedemann sat up at once, with an exaggerated air of respect. He saw from Holz's look of annoyance that he

had expected to find Hesse alone, and he smiled jauntily. Hesse spoke pleasantly.

"I think you wanted to see Otto about—about your plans. Shall I lend you the room?"

"Heavens no! It's not important."

Choking over the slight, Wiedemann pointed to his manifesto lying on the table. He could not speak. Holz picked up the single sheet and began reading it. The room was now dark and he carried it over to the gas-jet, which hissed like a kettle and spread a ring on the ceiling, but not much light elsewhere. The young man's thin beaked nose leaned forward like the bow of a ship.

"Why do you write as though you were addressing fools?"

"Because people are fools. If you are reasonable they suspect you. But you can tell as many lies as you like if you tell them in a simple voice. No lie is too black for people to believe it. The blacker the better, my dear Max. Do you want to lead people?"

"Men, not donkeys," said Holz.

"If they weren't donkeys you couldn't lead them," Wiedemann cackled.

"Well, I don't like schoolboy insults and crude lying," Holz said. He rolled the paper into a ball and threw it to Wiedemann. "Here. Take it. Write something I can read without feeling sick. I shan't ask anyone for money to print that."

Wiedemann stood up. "Write your own," he said sullenly.

"As you please."

Holz turned his back. After an instant, Wiedemann's defiance gave way. He began weeping. Tears spouted from

his eyes in a summer downpour, as though he were full of water. Holz took no notice except to make an impatient gesture. It was Hesse who began carefully to rebuild Wiedemann's vanity, flattering him, making a jest of Holz's scruples, without rousing the slightest annoyance in Holz, who kept his back turned, his nose shut in one of Hesse's books, from which half audibly he was reading verse to himself. At last Wiedemann recovered, but he refused to sit down. He must go, he had another appointment: he implied that an important person expected him. Hesse went out with him, leaving the door open. They went down the steps together. We heard Wiedemann's voice flowing back, from the yard, from the alley. He was more insistent than a woman in justifying himself.

"God help me," said Holz. "The muck I have to work with."

He was silent. I began arranging my excuses for leaving. Neither young man wanted me, but I am not skilled in leaving; out of shame I overstay my welcome with strangers. I could see that Holz expected me to go at once.

We heard two people coming up the stairs together. Holz groaned.

"Surely he hasn't fetched him back!"

Hesse stood aside in the doorway of the room to allow a young man in French uniform to walk in front of him. The young Frenchman hesitated, perhaps taken aback by the room. Hesse gave him a gentle push, looking at Holz.

"Max, here is my cousin, Jean de St Ciers, from Bourg. He has been stationed in Bonn. I haven't seen him since the year before the war. Jean, this is my friend. Max von Holz."

Holz bowed with painful stiffness. For the first time I noticed that he was shabby as well as thin and strained.

"You are on leave?" he said civilly.

St Ciers spoke German very badly. He managed to say that he had been posted to Cologne, attached to the staff of the French liaison officer with the Commissioner. He was blond and broad-shouldered, with bluish eyes in a narrow long head. Out of uniform he would have passed for the German and Holz for the son of a Girondin doctor. The antagonism between them was a question of will, not of bone.

Holz moved towards the door.

"You're not going?" Hesse said.

"Certainly." He had no need to say that he refused to meet a Frenchman.

I followed him out. On the landing I discovered that my shoe-lace was loose. Fastening it, I heard Hesse speaking French very slowly, with a gap between each word, as though each had to be roused.

"What colour is the Gironde now?"

And the answer. "The same at the same hours."

One hot day in June Hesse asked me to come with him to Bonn. I was surprised to see St Ciers waiting on the Ring station. He joined us. The passengers seated nearest to us moved away, leaving a space across which the Frenchman could not infect them with stubbornness, implacable judgments, and a training in logic. What surprised me was St Ciers' want of tact in allowing Hesse to compromise himself in this way. He seemed oblivious to the effect of his uniform on the passengers. I realised after a time that he

regarded the Germans precisely as he would have regarded the natives of a French colony—with as much interest, not more, as he felt for the scenery. He would not, until these inconvenienced him, trouble about their habits. And since he did not see it as his duty to try to civilise the Germans he felt no discomfort now. He thought of Hesse as his kinsman, and gave him no marks for courage in showing himself with a leper.

Perhaps it was not courage. Perhaps it was nothing but the defiance a quick-witted young man feels towards society. Kurt Hesse may really have had in him the makings of a discreet self-seeking adaptable man of affairs. Who can say now?

He had a trick when he was excited of passing his tongue over his long delicate upper lip. I saw him do it a dozen times on the short journey. He could, it appeared, turn paler. His eyes had as much life as the eyes in a good portrait, an arrest of life at the point when it breaks up and is thrown away in movement. I saw him notice at one moment that his right shoe was cracked. He blushed deep red all over his thin face.

In Bonn St Ciers took us through the park to a house with a long terraced garden. The Rhine and its wharfs lay below the garden, colourless and glittering, as much light in it as in a hedge of wet leaves. The sunlight was dazzling. Even under the thickest tree in the garden, a chestnut, it made one drowsy. An orderly brought out three bottles of Moselle and four glasses. The fourth was for a Captain Morvan, who had been expecting us; he greeted St Ciers with wild enthusiasm, shouting with joy, and Hesse and myself warmly enough, a little fussily, like a young dog learning manners.

"My God, how dull it is here without you," he said to St Ciers. "It reminds me of my year in Morocco, nothing but the army and natives. Incredible!"

Hesse opened his eyes widely.

"Yes, it must seem like that to you," he said softly.

The little Frenchman jumped round. "My dear chap," he cried. "I assure you. I am complaining about the lack of conversation. If you could spend an evening in the mess you would sympathise. Not for the world—what am I saying?—you must forgive me. Let me fill your glass."

St Ciers laughed.

"No place with Morvan in it lacks conversation," he said affectionately.

I now saw how unlike him was the quietly formal youth he appeared in Cologne among Germans. Sprawling in his chair, one ankle clasped on his knee, he seemed older, experienced, smooth. He was at home here. I wondered whether, in the history of his family, the root stock had wandered from the Rhine to the Gironde. He kept his tunic buttoned to the neck—Morvan had thrown his off—but he had an air of undress.

"Nonsense!" cried Morvan. "He always says I talk too much. It's a lie. I never open my mouth unless I'm drunk, and I'm never drunk. What good wine you have here," he said to Hesse. "Almost as good as Bordeaux. And when I say that I've said the best I can for it. You must come to Bordeaux. I'll stand you a claret there, a *Pavillon Blanc*, you'll enjoy; I swear you will. You enjoy drinking, don't you? Of course you do, every sensible man does. Ha, why did we quarrel with you? Far better if we'd exchanged wines. It's ridiculous for Rhinelanders and Bordelais to fight. Next time we'll be together against the English—who only

drink whiskey, and think themselves civilised. My God, how I detest the English." He clasped his forehead. "Now what have I said? This is your fault, old boy. Why did you bring all these enemy nations with you? Here, drink, let us drink."

He filled my glass and his own.

Hesse had listened to him with a half mocking, half friendly smile.

"So next time we're to be allies?" he said.

"Why not?" cried Morvan. "Why not? We could put Europe in our pockets."

"Perhaps it would have the same effect if we intermarried. You might give us what we need—a little—" Hesse paused—"a different education. Our children might be brought up to argue about things instead of to behave. We might learn to respect words for their meanings: our minds would become severe and precise—instruments for measuring instead of distorting life. We should look at a lake and see so much handsome water instead of, as we do, seeing a symbol, a Germanic myth, a summons to worship the sun or build a bonfire and jump through it or go to war."

"Yes, yes, not at all—" Morvan began.

Hesse coolly interrupted him.

"We need, you know, something to cure us of mysticism, of not being able to walk among trees or climb a hill without our heads filling with vapour—clouds—visions—God or the Mothers or Fichte knows what."

He spoke in a calm smiling voice, but his excitement showed itself in his hands. They were folded on his knees, fingers pressing the skin so that the bones started up.

St Ciers clapped his hands: when the orderly came he asked him:

"Is any of the Saar wine left?"

The man came back carrying two bottles rolled in wet cloths. It was a very thin wine, delicate and aromatic. Tasting it, I felt under my hand the dry hill-side over my grandmother's house, thyme, sheep droppings, rock, the earth cracked by the sun. Go, I said, go: leave me. The sun split open the branches; my glass spurted light as I moved it; and, leaning forward, I could see the Rhine wheeling to north and south, a bird of prey.

St Ciers was saying in a baffled voice:

"But you would destroy Germany. It's just because you have energy left over for myths that we admire you."

"Nonsense," cried Hesse, "nonsense, nonsense. You Frenchmen only admire yourselves."

"Oh, come," Morvan said, good-humoured and uneasy.

St Ciers did not speak for a minute. Then, with a sly ashamed smile, he said:

"Kurt, do you remember telling me when you were in Bourg that you would give me a stork with a red beak when I stayed with you in Honnef? What else do you suppose I hoped to find in Germany?"

Hesse shook his head.

"I never suppose that it was you who wanted the left bank of the Rhine, and forty-five million tons of ore," he said ironically. "But you and I, Jean, are simple souls. Almost innocent. We shan't, you know, be left in peace. No, no. No fairy-tale storks for you in this life, my boy. You French have defeated us, but we shan't accept it—we never, you know, accept pain or defeat as part of life. We used to think that the Hero—we see ourselves in him, you know—rushed forward when he died into more fighting, drinking, breeding. When that illusion was taken from us, by

science, by scholars—probably Jews—we decided never to look reality in the face again. We never grow up. We're lawless, cringing, dreamy, by turns, like children, and charming like children, until the moment when, as nurses say, we 'get past ourselves.' Then you begin to hate us. But you don't think of helping us. You punish us. One of these days, no doubt, we shall set fire to the house; we shall burn it to the ground, with everything in it—Chartres, the Black Forest, Vienna, Prague, Cracow. How you will hate us then. And how in our hearts we shall blame you, for leaving us to play with matches in an icily cold room."

He stopped and covered his eyes with his hands, then with a smile apologised to us for making a scene.

"Not at all, not at all," Morvan said hurriedly. His black eyes were sparkling with a shrewd cynical interest. He was out of his depth, and entirely cold-blooded about it. At their most excitable and murderous the French remain cold-blooded to a degree which makes them difficult to love. Fortunately they don't care to be loved.

"I'm sorry."

"Good God, there's no need for that. Nobody's hit."

"It's the sun, you know, in this garden."

"You can't have too much sun," Morvan said. "Nor too much to drink. Have some more."

"Thanks, I must go."

Hesse got up, and stood looking for a moment at the river. We all stood up. St Ciers was staying the night in Bonn. He walked with us through the house to the street. Glancing back from the door into the garden, I saw Morvan standing, his short muscular legs widely apart, hands on his thighs, watching us. I was too far from him to see

his expression, but his posture was that of a dismounted jockey. Clearly he thought we were a poor field.

"Goodbye, Kurt, until Monday."

"Goodbye."

St Ciers hesitated. "You know, my grandmother—our grandmother, I should say—expects you in Bourg any time you want to come."

"Thanks. You said that before."

"Did I? Well—you didn't say you would come."

"Oh, I shall come."

St Ciers went back into the house. Hesse and I walked to the station: he took us out of our way to show me the eighteenth-century Rathaus.

"It's not very handsome, is it? Have you noticed how our old buildings are on their best behaviour always? You never see them plastered with old decrees or handbills, or with a urinal propped against them—as you can easily find in France. The truth is we don't use things. We let them use us. I suppose the French caught the habit from the Romans. A pity we were not properly conquered."

"Look."

I pointed across the square.

"Where—what?"

"Isn't that your friend Wiedemann? Look—across there."

Hesse narrowed his eyes against the sun, which was blinding.

"I don't see him."

"He went into the side street. I'm certain it was he. If it was, he was with a French officer and a couple of *louche*-looking civilians."

"Then it wasn't Wiedemann. He refuses to sit in the

same café as a Frenchman." Hesse laughed. "Not like me, you know—Otto is irreconcilable."

On the twenty-third of October I was in Berlin. Over breakfast in a Kurfürstendam café I read in my paper that there had been a Separatist putsch in Bonn. The rebels had run up the red, white and green flag over the Rathaus and proclaimed a Rhineland Republic. I ran back to my room, to pack my few clothes, and caught a train to Cologne. I was thinking of Hesse.

The first person I saw when I left the station was Wiedemann. He attached himself to me at once, firmly, refusing to be shaken off. To get rid of him I took him into a café in the Hohestrasse.

He was full of himself and his troubles. His thesis for his doctorate—I forget the subject; it was something windy enough to suit him—had been rejected by the university. He was shaking with anger. He blamed one of the professors, a Jew.

"It was Markstein. I'm certain of it. The Jewish swine. He knew I despised him. He seized his chance to try to ruin me. I—you know what it means to me—my whole future. And I wanted to serve Germany."

As usual, his pity for himself strangled his vanity. He began to cry, wiping his eyes with his sleeves. I noticed that he was wearing a silk shirt and handsome cuff-links.

"What has been happening in Bonn?"

"Oh, that." He sat up. A look of extreme spite and ill-temper crossed his face. "It shows you what the French are capable of. And a man like Kurt Hesse is friendly with them. I blame him. He is an aristocrat—without heart or

conscience. He insists on calling himself a European. Decent people would call him a traitor."

I was astonished. Although Hesse had said this creature hated him I had not believed it. What a fool I had been. Whom should Wiedemann hate if not the friend who had protected him—who pitied him? He could only empty over Hesse the hatred he felt for himself every time he was snubbed. Every cell in his sickly body was fermenting a hatred that would have poisoned him if he had not been able to throw it off on Hesse.

"I thought you were a friend of his," I said.

"I? Well—in a manner of speaking, you may say I am. He makes use of me, you know. I criticise his poems for him. Didn't you know he fancied himself as a poet?" He gave a yelp of amusement. "Oh, yes—our good Kurt sees himself as a future Rilke or something of the sort. Excuse me, I can't help laughing. Dear me, must you go?"

I knew that if I got up quickly and paid he would sit still rather than limp after me. He liked to hide his lameness by walking very slowly, swinging his thin arms.

"You can believe me," Max von Holz said. "I can show you reports from witnesses. French cavalry put the Separatists into the Rathaus. French troops are keeping them there. In Düren the French turned black troops on the crowds who were trying to deal with the Separatists. In Speyer the French have armed the Separatists; they are protecting them in every way, even allowing them to torture village officials who refuse to obey their orders. Go and see for yourself. You are an Englishman. Who wants to shoot you?"

It was as cold now in Hesse's attic as it had been airless

in summer. An icy draught came under the door from the outer staircase; a second cut through the skylight, which had to be open to let out the fumes of an oil stove. It was one of these wretched objects, a few inches high, on which you can boil a kettle. I had bought oil for it.

We sat round it, we three, trying to warm at least the ends of our fingers.

Holz was in a constant cold anger. It made him oblivious to the pain of chilblains on his feet and hands. His nose had sharpened; it was a flying buttress to his forehead.

I was thankful to see that Hesse was almost calm. He certainly disliked what was going on, but he had begun to write—not, I think poetry, but the note-book I found a week or two later. It was an account of his life during the past year; reflected in it was his year in Bourg, and it was written from a standpoint outside this double life. With this air of detachment he managed to convey a feeling of triumph and happiness—I have not read anywhere anything of this kind. Imagine a bird holding itself, with exquisite precision, in the current of a stream of air. The writing had this delight, as simple and controlled. It was a fragment—less than eight thousand words. Clearly, the young man who wrote it was not impatient.

Holz began rubbing his fingers, one of which was bleeding.

"Since you've come back, I suppose you care about us. Let me tell you." His face changed. "Kurt, I may say, disapproves of us."

"Not of you," Hesse said. "Never, if we live to be a hundred."

"Of what I do—which is the same thing," Holz said bitterly.

"No. It is not."

"What are you doing?" I asked.

He told me a little more than I suspected. He, Wiedemann, and some others—Kapp-Schiller and Lochner among them—were what he called a Centre. There were other Centres, but about these he knew nothing. He did not even know, or he was not going to tell me, who were the heads of this secret society. He knew they were very reputable people. He said one was a State official. A cousin of his, a cavalry officer, was the head of a Centre in Unoccupied Territory.

"It may be a month before we can shoot two of the traitors in Bonn. Shooting is too easy for them. If I could I would have them slowly beaten to death."

Hesse looked at him.

"You are talking about other Germans," he said quietly.

"I am talking about lice."

"They haven't ceased to be Germans. And Germans would have to do the beating."

"Kurt," Holz said, controlling himself, "do you suppose this is the sort of life I expected to live when we finished with the war? It's one thing to kill when you're in uniform, and quite another to turn assassin in cold blood. Except that my blood is not cold. I would shoot a million Germans if they were traitors to Germany."

I drew back from the stove. It was pleasanter freezing than with my hands between those of the young men.

"Tell me," Hesse said slowly, "what do you hope for the future of Germany now that Germans have begun killing each other?"

Holz still kept his hands over the stove, with blood round the base of one nail. His fingers stiffened.

"The future? We Nationalists—"

"If you get your way in the country by hating and murdering, the future is horrible," Hesse said. He looked away. "The future," he said sorrowfully, "oh, Max, my dearest—the future you insist on arranging may see us on opposite sides. We may, you know, be enemies."

Holz stood up.

"You will still be able to go to Bourg," he said.

"Jean is only my cousin."

"You repeat his views! He has put all this wretched stuff in your mind."

"That you know is not true. Think how many hundred times we argued before he came."

Holz had gone over to the bed. He was leaning against it, his face indistinct—it was almost dark in the room, at three in the afternoon. He did not answer for a moment. Then he said in a low voice:

"Yes, that is true."

"Of course it's true," Hesse said, with his slight smile.

He got up. Holz took a few steps towards him. They looked at each other, smiling.

"Your hand is bleeding," Hesse said.

Holz glanced at it with indifference.

"So it is. It's that damned chilblain."

Hesse pulled his handkerchief out of his pocket and tore a piece off it. He fastened it round Holz's finger.

"Is that comfortable?"

"Comfortable enough."

"I can't spare the whole handkerchief. They're getting scarce."

"Like everything else," said Holz. He laughed. "Well,

thank God we've still got plenty of time. We're alive. We're young."

I thought I might put a word in now.

"If I sit here any longer I shall freeze. Come out with me and have coffee."

Holz agreed and began folding his scarf inside his jacket. He had no overcoat.

"I'll join you later," Hesse said. "I'm expecting Otto. I didn't invite him, you know. He invites himself. He's taken to writing poetry—he reads it to me. I should like to be able to praise it; he needs encouragement, poor devil. It's fearfully bad. I listen, and tell him to read Laforgue; he curses me for admiring the French and goes away admiring himself, and feeling a better man."

The October afternoon was warmer in the street than in Hesse's room. An immense cherry tree burned to a quiet end against the wall of a house. In these side streets the life of a city gathers itself between closed fingers, refolds itself in cupboards smelling of the family, goes on its knees, and dries a handful of thoughts between the sheets of yesterday's newspaper. I never feel any wish to be invited to watch the life that goes on behind these curtains and shutters. Let them keep the secrets of their pianos, plaster heads of Apollo or an aunt, clocks, models of a tower, dry grasses, and the books no one opens. The anonymous life of streets and cafés pleases me far better. In my old age when I am forced to sit behind curtains I shall be able to open the album and warm myself on the bank of the Garonne or in the Revolutions-Platz of some since spoiled city.

"Do you mind if we call at my aunt's?" Holz said in a

voice he tried to make civil. "I have a message for Fräulein von Marbach."

He would take any means to avoid affronting Baroness von Marbach with the sight of an Englishman he knew nothing about. I made it easy for him when we reached the house by buying an evening paper.

"I'll wait down here for you," I said.

I stood inside the front door, in a passage. The house must once have belonged to a middle-class family. Now every floor was sublet. I was up to the eyes in smells of cabbage, washing, and a curious sour smell that recalled a captured German dug-out. What the devil did the English soldier smell of? Were these smells always the same? Would, for example, a stranger in Paris in 1360 be able to pick his way at night along the rue St Jacques from Peter the Englishman to Peter the Dane and Peter the German only by using his nose?

Holz raced up the uncarpeted stairs. I could hear him stop on the second floor; a door opened after a time; I moved as noiselessly as I could to the foot of the stairs. Sophie's voice was not under control. It rose from muffled to loud, and sometimes squeaked. It was very strange to hear this girl's voice at large in the house; once it escaped from her she could do nothing with it; it betrayed and mocked her, giving away the undarned heels of her stockings and the smell of wool next her armpits. To Holz because he could see her she had a delicate skin and slightly unfocussed blue eyes. That, and not her voice, full of reproach, childish and obstinate, was what he heard.

"Mamma is at church. Do you want to wait for her?"

"I won't come in, since you're alone."

"Oh, why not?" Here her voice was loud—I am sure it embarrassed her and she was ashamed of it.

"Your mother—"

"Yes, I know, I know. I can't understand why you're all so silly. It's silly to behave as though we were still living at Godesberg, as though father were alive, as though nothing had happened and we were engaged and I had begun working initials on linen. This is five years after the war!"

"We are still the same as we were," Holz said slowly.

"We pretend to be, you mean."

She laughed.

"What shall I give you for your birthday?" Holz said, in such a low voice I should not have heard him if the house had not been quiet. Perhaps other people were listening behind the doors. "What would you like? Tell me."

"May I have what I like?"

"If I can afford it, child."

"I should like something living. Oh, Max, I should like a squirrel."

"Heavens, Sophie!"

"Well, he could live in that glass place behind the kitchen. I suppose someone grew plants there: it's empty except for Mamma's trunks. We could easily move those."

"Very well. If I can—"

"You can, you can! Oh, don't go yet."

"I must. Hush. People will hear you."

Sophie was quiet. She murmured something I did not catch. I crept back to the end of the passage and leaned against the wall, opening my newspaper. Her voice had gone back. After a moment the door shut, and Holz began to walk down the stairs.

Hesse did not join us in the café in the Hohestrasse. Next day I called at his room at five o'clock, when I knew he would have come in, and before Holz—who worked later—was likely to be there.

The tobacconist, a sullen fellow, did not answer my Good-day as I walked through the shop. I looked down from the bend of the stairs and saw his face turned after me with a look of dislike and mortification. For a moment I thought of speaking to him. But why should I try to understand strangers? It only involves me in what is ridiculous in them.

Hesse was boiling water for coffee. He gave me a cup. It was at least hot, and flavoured with something.

"Why didn't you come yesterday?"

"I didn't get rid of Wiedemann as easily as I expected."

"He is an unpleasant fellow," I said.

"It's very little use expecting young men of my generation to be pleasant," Hesse said, sighing. "We resent too much. It make us, you know, weak or cunning, or murderers. I wish—" he broke off.

"What do you wish?"

"Nothing you, as a sensible Englishman, could understand."

"What makes you think I'm sensible?" I asked. I had difficulty in not laughing at him.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Even if you're not," he said in a severe voice, "I needn't pity you; you can go home, and go into politics or business and give up thinking. I was going to say I wished we had the courage to break up every machine in the country except simple agricultural machines: with only what we could grow and make our-

selves, we should be the most powerful nation in the world—without aeroplanes or artillery.”

“Do you love Germany?” I asked him, inquisitive.

Hesse smiled.

“During the war I carried a pinch of earth from Honnef in my pocket.”

We heard steps coming up the stairs from the shop. I thought it was Holz. I realised there were two people. The door was roughly opened, and Kapp-Schiller and Lochner walked in. One of them closed the door: the other, Kapp-Schiller, came forward to the table where Hesse was sitting, bent over him, and seized him rudely by the shoulder. Hesse sprang up, shaking him off. No feeling, either surprise or anger, showed in his face.

“What the devil are you up to?” he said quietly.

Kapp-Schiller lost his balance and caught hold of the pile of books. It collapsed. He recovered himself and began kicking and stamping on the scattered books.

“Stop that,” Hesse said.

He stooped to pick one up. At once the two young men sprang on him and forced him back against the wall. Kapp-Schiller’s blue eyes were fixed and stupid with anger; he was unable to control his arms when he stepped away from Hesse; they hung down, twitching at the shoulder. Lochner, who was short and thick-set, had seized Hesse’s arms from behind and was squeezing them together. Hesse made another convulsive effort and almost freed himself, but when Kapp-Schiller jumped on him again he stood still, leaning against the wall sideways, his head hanging.

I had been too startled to act. Now I struck Kapp-Schiller hard on the chest. He fell against the table with a

clatter of smashed cups, then rushed at me with a wildness that made him very easy to deal with. A rank smell of sweat and cloth came from him. I should have had him on the floor in a minute, but Hesse's voice stopped both of us. He was cold and almost bored.

"Have the goodness to stop making fools of yourselves. What is it you want? You, Kapp-Schiller. What is it?"

Kapp-Schiller's white eyelashes flickered, as though a light moved across his cheeks.

"Will you give us your word not to move?" he said sulkily.

Hesse smiled.

"Give you my word? You wouldn't know what to do with it."

"What is this about?" I said.

"Shut up, Englishman," said Lochner, "shut up, shut up, shut up. You'd better go."

Hesse spoke quietly.

"Very well. I shan't move."

Lochner released him at once—with relief, I thought. Kapp-Schiller was pulling the edges of his jacket together where I had ripped it across. His face had a childlike expression of dismay—he was wondering, I think, how he could buy another. I felt oddly guilty.

"Now," Hesse said.

Kapp-Schiller started, leaving go of his rags.

"We're going to search the room," he said in a cracked voice.

"Do you—" I began.

Hesse lifted his hand. For an instant of suspense I watched it; it was as though it kept back something that would force its way, like tresses of water, between the

fingers. There was a smell of oil as the little stove sputtered out. The gas hissed. I noticed the grotesque shadow made by Kapp-Schiller on the wall.

"Very well. Search," Hesse said, slowly.

The two young men searched roughly but with method. They emptied the table drawer of its few papers, creasing them as they turned each in cold heavy paws. In feeling along a narrow shelf where Hesse kept his kettle and a pot or two they brought it crashing to the floor. Then Lochner kicked the lock of the trunk to open it, and they upended it and began shaking and pawing each garment: Hesse suffering in having these torn and mended vests, shirts, an old jacket, exposed. They were getting too near him. Kapp-Schiller began turning over the books. He held them upside down by the spines, fluttering the leaves, and suddenly snatched up a note-book and began reading it. A jeering inquisitive look came over his face, the look of a boy who has learned something ridiculous about a weaker companion. He was going to read aloud. Hesse stepped forward.

"Put that down."

"What?"

"Put it down." Hesse controlled himself. "It's not what you're looking for. I'll tell you where that is."

He walked behind Kapp-Schiller, who spun round to watch him, and stooped over the scattered books, looking among them to find the one he wanted. He found it and held it out. Mistrustfully, watching him still, the other dropped the note-book. It fell close to my feet and I picked it up.

Kapp-Schiller was turning over the leaves of the book: I recognised it—a copy of Rilke's *Neue Gedichte*: I had

seen it lying on the top of the pile of books yesterday afternoon. He found something. A card and a half sheet of paper folded together. Without saying a word he took them to the gas-jet and read them. But I have been through this already, I thought. He lifted his head, and looked, still without speaking, at Hesse; who smiled. I did not know what was going on. I had what in the war we used to call the needle. Suddenly Kapp-Schiller squealed like a horse. After a second he recovered himself and walked over to the table, and leaned on it with both hands so that he could look closely at Hesse.

"Well. So Otto knew what he was talking about."

"When did you see him?" Hesse asked.

"Last night."

"Why didn't you come then?" Hesse said calmly. He looked at the other young man with a sarcastic smile. "I might easily have torn those things up before now. A poor couple of police you are!"

He was self-possessed and pale. His look expressed indifference and contempt, both deliberate.

"Is it what Otto said?" Lochner asked impatiently.

"Yes, yes."

Kapp-Schiller threw the things across the table. I looked at them as Lochner turned them over slowly, over and over, in his hand—the card resembled an identity card, but it was stamped by the "Police Commissar for the Rhineland Republic, Bonn": I could not make out the illiterate handwriting on the sheet of notepaper, but I could see that it was a personal letter, signed "Ludwig Schulz. For the President of the Rhineland Republic."

"You poor fool." Hesse said quietly. "If those really

belonged to me do you suppose I should leave them lying about here in a book?"

"Who do they belong to?" asked Lochner. He had waited a moment, looking at Kapp-Schiller.

"He expected you to ask that," Kapp-Schiller said.

Hesse raised his eyebrows. I don't think he would have spoken again, but I said:

"For God's sake, Hesse."

"How many times," Kapp-Schiller burst out, "have you heard him sneer at Nationalists? People have seen him about with a French officer. He—"

Max von Holz opened the door. He stared for less than a minute at the disorder in the room, then closed the door quietly, turning to close it, and said:

"What is going on here?"

Excited, with that look on his face of a vicious stupid horse, Kapp-Schiller reached across the table, took the card and letter from under Lochner's hand, and held them out.

"We've been looking for these. They're his."

Holz turned them over. He looked up and saw Hesse watching him with his slight smile. An extraordinary expression of fear and triumph crossed his face.

"Is this what you meant?" he asked Hesse.

Hesse spoke quietly. "I don't understand you."

"You said we should be on opposite sides."

After a minute Hesse said calmly:

"Did I? I don't remember."

"Perhaps you remember better your conversations with St Ciers."

Hesse opened his eyes widely, so that the light came through them from his skull. A look of grief, of intel-

ligence, of pity, altered his face. The voice was almost humble in which he said:

"This room, Max. Me. Do you know me or not?"

I heard the gas-jet again—and someone's breath. Surely I heard the last, or am I imagining it now?

Holz stepped close to his friend.

"Well, you only have to explain," he said quickly, almost easily.

I who was watching Hesse's hands saw them stiffen.

"Do you want me to prove that those things aren't mine?" he said sharply. "Very well. I shan't. I shan't do it for you or for anyone else."

"There you are," screamed Kapp-Schiller.

"Don't be a fool, Kurt," Holz said. "You can easily tell us where you got them."

"I could, but I'm not going to."

"I beg you," Holz said in a low voice.

Hesse ran his tongue over his upper lip.

"Run away," he said. "Run away and play at being a conspirator somewhere else. You bore me very much."

Holz blushed deeply. He turned and went out of the room.

Kapp-Schiller lowered his head. His silhouette on the wall spread its knees and lowered its head, misshapen. I watched him approach Hesse, who was stooping over the table.

"What are you going to do?"

Hesse looked up sharply.

"What do you mean? What business is it of yours what I do? Get out of my room. All of you."

"You remember what happened to that fellow Smeets?"

Do you want that? Seeing you used to be an officer—weren't you?—I thought—”

“Oh, was it you who shot him?” interrupted Hesse, yawning and stretching his arms.

Kapp-Schiller took a revolver out of his pocket. I rushed at him, and Lochner seized me with both arms round the waist. While I struggled with him, Kapp-Schiller laid the revolver down on the table in front of Hesse, with an inquisitive smile. Turning away, he helped Lochner to drag me to the door.

Hesse was watching us with a look of disgust—indescribable. Yes, it would be useless—do you understand?—to try to make it bearable by describing it.

“Must you go on squabbling in my room?” he said wearily.

Kapp-Schiller had opened the door. He shoved me on to the landing, and stepped after me, and he and Lochner jostled me towards the stairs. On the stairs, I shook myself free and tried to straighten my clothes before crossing the shop. The tobacconist looked at us with dull angry curiosity and looked away. Whatever had happened, he would keep out of it.

It was dark in the street, in which a shaft of light crossed a wall, like a staircase leading to nothing. The two young men went off to the right without glancing at me again. Thinking only of getting away from them, I hurried off, my head aching from the cold. I felt disgraced and uneasy, as though I had behaved with inexcusable clumsiness in Hesse's room. Trying to forget my mortification, I walked myself out of breath; I was in the Hohestrasse before I remembered watching Kapp-Schiller leave his revolver on the table, with that schoolboy snigger. His smile

struck me now as peculiarly unpleasant. What the devil is it all about? I wondered. I turned and began to walk back, reluctant and dully confused in mind. The thought of forcing myself on Hesse was unbearable. I walked a few yards, and turned round once more towards my hotel. I stood still. The feeling of impotence—that I had not the wit to know what to do—exasperated me. The instant I had thought of going to Holz I began running.

He lodged, Holz, in a house and a street a degree shabbier than Hesse's, and not more than five minutes from him. He was in. He was reading; he kept his book open in his hand to snub me, and so that I should know he was indifferent. It was the youngest thing I ever knew him do. When I finished he said:

"I should have thought it was simple, even for you. They knew he doesn't own a revolver—he has often said so. They were saving him trouble by lending him one. Do you want anything?"

"Then do you expect him to shoot himself?" I asked.

He looked down at his book. Suddenly, he lost control of himself. He threw the book away and jumped up.

"You fool. You vulgar Englishman."

"You believe he has been working for the French?" I said.

He moved his head from side to side, in a curious gesture, his eyes sullen.

"I believed it for a minute," he said slowly, "because of that cousin of his. Then I did not believe it. Then, when he refused to explain, and when I—you saw him, you heard what he said—I had to believe. He is guilty. He must be punished or punish himself."

The shock of anger I felt passed. I had a sensation of

cold, as though an icy plain began at the door of the room, covering Germany: in the darkness of this intolerable and bitter cold I saw Kurt Hesse struggling to breathe. I turned to go to him. I knew he didn't want to see me.

"I hope," I said, "I never have to rely on a friend as unreliable as you."

I had to feel my way down an unlighted staircase. It was unfamiliar. I had felt my way across a yard and was fumbling with the house door when Holz caught me up. We hurried without speaking along the street, across a dark windy square, and along another interminable street into Hesse's. What Holz saw I don't know. I saw chiefly the disorder in the room Hesse himself had to keep clean, and the flattened quivering jet of gas giving its poor light. We reached the shop after the tobacconist, locking the door as we came up, had turned away.

"Open it for us," Holz said. He was short of breath.

The man stared.

"Go to the devil, or go round."

He started to go away. Holz seized him and swung him round.

"Give me the key," he said in a low voice.

The man began shouting for the police. Holz let him go and ran after me the length of the dark street to the lane at the back. The first step into it I fell over a heap of something; after that we stumbled along it, feeling the wall, to the yard door. It was open.

From the foot of the steps I could see the skylight in Hesse's room, and because there was still a light in it I thought things were all right. Holz was in front of me on the stairs. He was the first to open the door of Hesse's room, and the first to see him lying across the table.

We turned him round. He was warm. He must have waited to hear the man leave his shop. The disgust had left his face. It was not calm but it was young.

Holz wanted to question St Ciers before the inquest. He asked me to go with him—why?—because two foreigners are better than one? because he needed a witness?

St Ciers took little notice of me and was carefully civil to Holz.

"If you know why my cousin killed himself, I ask you to tell me. You can rely, I hope, on my not repeating anything."

He waited. Holz was seated facing him across a table.

"There is something you can tell me first," he said. He seemed at a loss for words.

After a minute St Ciers said:

"What is it you want to know? I saw Kurt only the evening before. He came here, late. He said some man he knew, Otto Wiedemann, was being paid by us to work with the Separatists. Your Separatists." He paused. "I know nothing about that—"

"How—when did he know about Wiedemann?"

"He had just learned it—Wiedemann had given himself away—somehow. I don't know. He wanted me to inform our authorities in Bonn that Wiedemann was discredited. He was giving the fellow a chance to bolt. I didn't ask any further questions." He smiled slightly. "I daresay you have as much liking for our Wiedemanns as I have."

Holz did not move.

"It will be easy for me to deal with him," he said.

"You were fond of Kurt."

Holz continued to look at St Ciers without speaking.

In many ways they were more alike than the cousins had been. They were simple and singleminded compared with Hesse. I saw that St Ciers would like to say he was sorry for Holz, but he did not try. They were alike—and they were profoundly pitilessly hostile. Their enmity is an old rotten tooth in Europe. Whether it or the sympathy goes deeper let someone else guess. How can I know?

“Kurt shot himself,” Holz said slowly, “because—”

“Excuse me,” I interrupted, “he shot himself because he was disgusted. The past—that is to say, the future, disgusted him. And he was alone.”

Both young men looked at me, Holz with anger, the young Frenchman with a cool penetrating curiosity.

“Even if you are right,” Holz said, “there is something else to say. But not to you.” He stood up. St Ciers got up instantly. They were of a height, dissimilar in looks, in bone, alike in will. To everything that was between them Hesse now added himself.

“I was going to say that it is really you, the French, who killed him—by inciting treachery like Wiedemann’s. He was not very like me. He was subtler—I think you would say, civilised. He loved France, too. I helped you, but it was you who killed him. Now you are dealing with us.”

St Ciers smiled.

“No doubt we shall manage it,” he said almost gaily.

“Thanks for finding time to see me,” Holz said. “And good-day.”

“Goodbye,” the other said, civilly and gently.

A death should end something. It should be a clear end, the crossing of a frontier, not only this stone close to the hand, under the hand, hurting it, but not in any sense

final. We stepped out into the weak sunlight, from the French headquarters, and there Cologne still was, its soil stained by men down to an unheard-of depth. The memory even of the Romans is close to the surface, and below that what marks of fingers on the edge of the river! The young man walking at my side, who may have been alive, and the other—who may have been dead—were less at home in this city than any of its buried savages. These would have been at ease in a world of brutish acts. So I thought. Yet when I was thinking it, with the same instinct I thought that ahead of us there must be something as primitive as the past, and as green and hopeful. There must be some cry at the other side of the gulf: some first touch of south in the wind: some stream promising under the reeds daylight and a moment's clear overflowing joy.

"What are you going to do now?"

"Find Wiedemann and get rid of him," Holz said in a sober voice. "It was like Kurt to give him a chance to clear off. That was always the weak spot in him—his pity for what is spoiled past saving."

I gave way to an impulse of cruelty.

"If you had had more pity in yourself, you might have saved your friend."

"Yes, I might," Holz said.

I went with him. I felt responsible in some way. Apart from that, I could not go back to my hotel, pack, and clear off, while somewhere in Cologne he was, perhaps, killing Wiedemann. Not that I minded what he did to Wiedemann, but I would prevent it, if I could, to save Holz himself. One should save what one can.

The girlish smile with which Frau Wiedemann greeted us was not—even for her—natural. I don't think she knew

what her son had been up to during these months, but she knew he was in trouble. He would tell her that before bolting.

The poor woman looked coquettishly into Holz's face, turning her hands in the black skirt she was wearing. It gaped down the side. There was a fleck of foam on her moustache in the corner of her lip.

"Where is—Otto?"

"Please come in, Herr von Holz. You, too—I am sorry, I forget your name, it's foolish of me, but there—it's what Otto always says, my memory isn't worth a laugh. He has such a splendid memory himself, my Otto. And such cleverness. And works so *so* hard to get on, poor boy. I know that one day he'll succeed. Oh, won't you sit down? Do—please."

Frau Wiedemann's lace bosom fluttered at an alarming rate. She held her head on one side and looked archly from one to the other of us. I thought she would probably collapse if she had to go on standing, and I sat down. Holz remained standing.

"I want to see your son, Frau Wiedemann."

"Dear, dear—he will be so disappointed. He's gone, you know. He went yesterday morning."

"Oh. Where?"

"Why, to Berlin."

"Have you his address?"

"Well, no, I haven't. He'll send it to me, of course, as soon as he knows it. But he went off in such a hurry—when he got the telegram. I was out when it came, shopping, you know—I always go early and choose my own vegetables; Otto is so careful about his food—he's quite right to be, of course. When I came in he was getting ready. He

was terribly pale. He was still in bed when I went out; he had had one of his bad nights; I had to hold his hand until he went to sleep, talking to him, just as when he was a little boy. Don't shut the door, mother, he used to say—and his little face all wet, his hands hot, holding me. You can believe me, those were times when he liked me to be with him."

A tear came in the corner of Frau Wiedemann's eyelid. She wiped it and her moustache.

"I shall miss him terribly. But there—when the poor boy is beginning his career at last, after all his disappointments—I mustn't be silly."

Holz had watched her with a curious mingling of repugnance and mistrust. He smiled suddenly. His face softened, but the marks on it of experience had become clearer. He had dropped his youth.

"Very well," he said gently. "Tell him, when you hear, that I called to see him."

"Yes, I will. I will indeed," Frau Wiedemann faltered. "Must I give him a message, Herr von Holz?"

Holz shook his head.

"No. There is no message, tell him."

As we left the room I noticed one or two objects that must have been Frau Wiedemann's own beloved possessions sneaking back—an Eiffel Tower in brass and a red and green china dwarf. If Otto never comes back, I thought, she will be able to console herself with her real past.

When we got outside I told Holz I was leaving tonight, going back.

"Well, you'll be out of all this in England," he answered, smiling. "For a time, at any rate."

"What are you going to do?"

"About Otto?"

"Other things—him, too."

"Oh, I'm leaving him for someone to finish off later. He's not worth my patience. I've something better to do."

"Yes?" I said.

He laughed soberly, almost slyly.

"There's Germany, you know. Mine, not Kurt's. His is done for. But mine—" He looked in front of him. "Come back in ten years and I'll show you something new."

When I think of the Rhine I see it heavy and full-flowing, the colour of dirty steel, just as I see the Loire sparkling in a clear early morning light. It is very seldom that I recall Holz except as a young man, thin, shabby, tall, eyes turned with a brooding indifference on the eddies swirling below the Hohenzollern Bridge.

I was trying to find a casual way of leaving him when the young woman came nervously towards us. Neither of us noticed her until she was a yard away. She was carrying her little muff—it must have been a relic of her childhood. In 1923 young women didn't carry muffs. It was cold and she had no gloves.

Holz's smile was polite. It must have taken Sophie aback. She must have felt mortified as though she had done something silly and ungainly. Her lower lip came forward. She looked sulky.

"I was coming to leave this note for you," she mumbled.

She drew it out of her muff. I saw her glance anxiously at her hand: she must have expected it to disgrace her by being dirty.

"Is it important?" asked Holz drily. He glanced at it and dropped it in his pocket. "Oh, it's from you."

"It is to say—I wanted you to know I am sorry."

"About Kurt? That is kind of you."

Sophie turned to go away. I saw she was going to cry as soon as she escaped. There was nothing to be done.

She made a convulsive little movement with her hands.

"I expect you've forgotten my squirrel?" she said noisily.

Holz's face softened as it had softened for Frau Weidemann. The lines round his eyes deepened. He smiled indulgently.

"Why, of course I haven't," he said, speaking slowly, painstakingly. "When is your birthday? You shall certainly have your squirrel."

BETWEEN MARCH AND APRIL

The morning train from Prague to Vienna left more than half empty. The only other person in my compartment was a young woman who had slept from the instant the train left the station. At the frontier she woke up, smiled, stretched, and looked with a bland interest at the steely smoke of rain masking the window.

"No one ought to travel in February," she said in a loud voice. "We ought to sleep through the winter and shed a skin in April or May."

Her skin still had a slight yellow-brown tinge, the traces of sunburn. She had rosy cheeks, and eyes of a pale clear blue, with a dark line round the pupils, delicate, as though drawn with a fine pen. She looked me over with the inhuman curiosity of a child or an animal. She cannot, I thought, be more than sixteen. At that she was tall, slender, her body below a narrow waist stretched between two wide hip-bones—a characteristically German body. When she was thirty-five and married, she would have a heroic figure. Heaven knows how many blond children would pass those long pillars, now as thin as stalks.

"Are you—" she yawned—"going to stay in Vienna?"

"Yes. I think so."

"How long for?"

"I don't know."

"Are you English?"

"Yes."

"I am Austrian. I have an Austrian passport. How old would you say I was?"

"Seventeen."

"No!" She had a delicious smile—white strong teeth: her mouth was a clear red without benefit of paint. "I'm twenty. Almost. I was born in 1918, in Prague. It was Austrian then. You didn't know that, of course; the English never know anything. My mother and father were Austrian. My father, let me tell you, was a well-to-do bookseller. One evening at the end of that year Czech police came into his shop and started tearing down the German notices. He protested. They struck him, and said, 'You're Czech now, no more of this cur's language.' He said nothing more to them because, you know, I was in the other room in my cot and he was afraid of wakening me. He began trying to come back to Vienna, and after a few months we left Prague. It was a great mistake. He managed to get a job selling newspapers in a hotel in Vienna. We were always poor and very hungry. He was a fool. I quarrelled with him every day when I grew up. At last I couldn't stand it any longer, and I left home. What do you think? He wanted to thrash me for going out in the evening. And I was earning my living! Can you imagine it! And my mother is as stupid as he is. Is your overcoat English?"

"Yes."

"May I feel it? What lovely cloth. Is it expensive? How much does a coat like this cost in England?"

"Eight or nine pounds."

"Is that expensive? I want to see London. Is it dearer to live there than Vienna? How much do silk stockings cost in London? . . . Really?" She made a grimace. "But perhaps I should earn more."

"What do you do?" I asked.

"I am an actress. Are you married?"

"No."

"Oh, you live with someone. I should like to marry—but not yet. I must try everything else first. Did you really think I was seventeen?"

"No. I thought you were younger."

"Heavens! I must let my hair grow. Do you like the colour? Yellow hair like mine is fashionable. My friend, the girl I share a flat with in Vienna, has hair as black as pitch." Suddenly she lowered her voice. "She is a Jewess."

"Yes?"

"Oh, you don't mind Jews? My father used to say it was because I have Jewish friends that I became wicked and wanted to live freely. How much did your scarf cost? Is it silk?"

To distract her attention I bought her a roll and a cup of coffee from the platform. She then asked if she might have a hot sausage and haggled a long time with the boy, trying to persuade him to give her two for the price of one and a half. I succeeded in paying for two and while she was eating them, vigorously, she abused me for wasting my money.

"You must have too much. I suppose you employ people and cheat them. Do you know what I think of a man like you?"

She raised her hand in the clenched fist salute. She gave me a tucked-in smile, which brought a dimple in one cheek. Her tongue, pale red like a cat's, licked swiftly round the edges of her lips for crumbs. She settled herself in her corner, getting ready—I could see it in her serene candid glance—to fire off another round of questions; but just as the train left Břeclav two passengers, a man and a young woman, hurried across the platform with their luggage. They were pushed into our carriage. No sooner were they seated than my fellow-traveller started the inquisition. They resisted at first, but in a few minutes the man—he was dried-up, elderly, with a greyish-brown skin the colour of a dead fish—was answering her with a resigned smile. Even his companion, a young woman elegant in furs, one eye obscured by her hat, unbent. Not even another woman, it seemed, could resist a curiosity as searching and disembodied as the questions asked by the severed head in the fairy-tale. Only this time, it was the goose-girl who asked. She coaxed from them that the man was Egyptian—"Egypt? Really? How can one get there?"—and the elegant young woman a Czech.

"Have you been married long? You have no children? Oh, you are on your honeymoon?"

Bringing her mouth close to my ear she whispered:

"It is obvious. She married him for his money."

When we reached Vienna I offered to help her with her suitcase. She allowed me to carry it to the barrier. A friend was waiting for her, a young Jew. It is difficult to say how one could be sure he was a Jew. He was tall, with straight

blunt features. Possibly it was his mouth, too mobile and delicate: or the too eager intelligence in his brown eyes. He had an air at once observant and lively, and curiously detached. He had a clear colour in his brown skin, and that, with the unusual brightness of his eyes, made him seem twice as alive as most people.

"Dr. Emil Wolf. He is Therese's brother—I spoke to you about her. He is a surgeon. Heavens, I don't know your name. Oh. Well, mine is Lotte. Lotte Mánes. He is travelling to amuse himself, Emil. He is English; he's not married; he—"

"Lotte, Lotte," the young man reproved her. He smiled. His smile drew to a point the lines running from his eyes to his sharp cheekbones and upwards to the hair springing, thick and untidy, above an ugly forehead. Yes, his forehead was ugly. There was the Jew, the man with too much intellect, the man to be envied, despised, stoned.

"Well, he told me himself."

"You didn't ask him, I suppose."

He gave me a sharp glance. He decided I could be trusted, and we exchanged indulgent smiles over the head of our child. Dodging it, rather—her head was on a level with mine.

Lotte had invited me to supper. The flat she and Therese Wolf shared was close to the Mariahilfer-strasse, that endless street of cheap shops and lodging-houses. I had been invited for seven. I arrived an hour late, and climbed six flights to the top of a house so hideous and solid that I thought I was in Berlin: the front was covered with stone objects like votive offerings, lungs, fingers, hearts, nipples, and other parts: inside, the smell of drains and car-

raway seeds brought one back abruptly to civilisation.

The top landing was unlighted. Striking matches, I saw two cards nailed on a door—Miss Lotte Mánes. Miss Wolf. There was no bell and no knocker.

I knocked. When I had given up hope the door opened. A young girl, dark, small, stood there smiling. I thought, at first, the servant. She was wearing a short black woollen frock and buttoned boots. Her dark hair was drawn back; she had a small face, but it was the face of a clown, sallow, sunken dark eyes, a wide mouth which, when the eyes smiled, conveyed by smiling a grieved mockery. As I knew later, she was eighteen—but no one knows how long time had been shaping, pinching and curling that mouth.

Therese took me into a small room crammed with dark solid furniture. When Lotte came out of her bedroom, leaving the door open, I saw that it, too, was filled with furniture of the same sort. A fine white lace cloth covered the table with the dishes of cold food and the coffee. Therese did not sit down. She took no notice when Lotte scolded her for waiting on us, but ran about, pressing food on me, answering Lotte in a deep quick voice, chuckling—clearly she was as proud as punch of the supper, the flat, and everything in it. I praised everything.

"All this belongs to Therese," said Lotte.

"You like it?" Therese said, smiling.

"You have beautiful things."

When she had gone into the kitchen, Lotte said:

"All these things belonged to Therese's parents. They are both dead; they were caught by accident in the riot when the Justiz-Palast was burned, that's eleven years ago; the police shot them, and as they were not workers—her father was a professor—they didn't even have a fine funeral. When

you know Therese, she will show you the house near the Prater where she was born; it seems her family lived there for six generations. All that bores me. It's silly to care about these things now. I say, 'Let's finish with the past! Leave it alone, don't break your heart for it! It's not worth anything.' " She struck her forehead lightly. "It is I who matter. Me, this me. I must live; I must enjoy things; I must learn. Therese, I think is mad. She spends hours polishing the cupboards and tables. I know what she is doing; she is living her childhood again; she is keeping all that alive, and her father and mother. Do you see that rug? That is Therese when she was two years old and her mother set her on it to play. I watch her moving from piece to piece, growing a year every few minutes, from one to eighteen. Bah!"

Therese came in.

"I'm telling him you are crazy to keep all this furniture," Lotte said.

"I like it," Therese said calmly.

"You ought not to like it. You are mad!"

When Therese came near her friend, Lotte caught hold of her, brushed a trace of flour off her sleeve and twitched her skirt into its folds. Her manner was that of an indulgent mother. She thought herself infinitely older and more experienced than the other girl.

We had almost finished supper when Emil Wolf came in. I had supposed he was Lotte's lover: I now saw that he looked on both girls as his sisters, but to him Lotte was the younger by at least a century. He teased her, mocked her, and almost made her cry. She was understudying a famous Viennese actress in a play which was being rehearsed. The part was of a middle-aged woman with a hus-

band and a lover. Lotte was bragging of the feeling she could bring to the part, if only—if only—

"Nonsense," Emil said. His eyes sparkled. "You are only a schoolgirl. You are as crude—as crude as new wine. Not even wine. You have just been planted. No one knows yet what you will make. You think that because you have a lover you know a great deal about life. You don't know as much as the little finger of the woman I operated on this morning, who has had one husband and six children and never been out of the same street since she married. If you play the part it will be a joke. I shall come, and sit at the back where you can't see me, and I shall laugh."

"But I can feel," Lotte said, turning red. "Simply because I am twenty and not forty—"

"You have feelings. You become excited; you are happy or unhappy; you admire a man; you let him stroke you as if you are a cat; you are inquisitive. But you don't feel. On the day when you feel something you will cry, cry, cry—or laugh—and you will not be young."

"Why do you try to discourage me?" Lotte said. There were tears in her eyes under the dark lashes.

"Don't take any notice of him," Therese said tenderly. She would not interrupt her brother, because that is not the respectful way to treat the man of the family, but she would comfort Lotte.

"I'm teaching her to think," Emil said lightly.

Lotte had recovered.

"When I'm old, as old as you are, when I am twenty-eight, I shall be wise and calm," she said in a confident voice. She laughed. "He is a devil," she said to me. "If I listened to him I should lose my courage. Ha, when I am a famous actress—rich—marvellous clothes—in ten years—"

"Oh, in ten years," Emil said quietly. "Why reckon in years? In ten weeks we shall be—where?—in prison—running for our lives."

I saw Therese caress with one hand the edge of the table; the other lay idle in her lap. Lotte smiled at me slyly.

"He is a surgeon, but he believes he can tell the future."

I looked at Emil.

"Surely things aren't so bad?"

"They're bad enough."

There was a knock at the front door, repeated and impatient. Lotte jumped up.

"It's Andreas."

She ran out of the room. I looked at the other two for the explanation, but they had drawn close together, sister to brother, without moving a fraction of an inch. You could not have got a pin between them, and neither heard what I said. Lotte's voice, grown softer and more eager, came back from the door. She ushered into the room, with a possessive smile which would have been fatuous if she had not been young and glowing, a handsome youth, tall, carefully dressed, a dandy. He gave each of us an amiable smile, and said in a brisk polite voice:

"Well, Therese? How d'you do, Wolf?"

He was civil to me, in the manner—or what he thought was the manner—of diplomatic circles, suave and authoritative, a little off-hand. I knew his sort. In England he would have condescended to a profession—publishing, perhaps. I guessed that his father had made money in business and married above him: I was not far out; his father was a successful lawyer who had married the widow of a Hohenlohe. Andreas was their second son; he painted a little, and designed clothes for his mother's friends.

Therese crept into the kitchen to make fresh coffee. Her buttoned boots, and the thin wool-stockinged legs above them, had become a servant's again. Nothing, certainly not Andreas, could put out Emil's vitality, but the extraordinary brilliance of his eyes had become naked, undefended: you saw that he was poor, his clothes were in bad, Jewish, taste, he was dissatisfied, as certain to be defeated as an animal behind bars.

"There was a row in the café this evening," Andreas said airily. "Someone thrashed a reporter from the *Telegraf*. He was a Jew, of course. Very foolish of him to be there."

"Very," Emil said. He smiled. "I hope he apologised."

"My dear chap, you know I don't mind Jews."

Lotte interrupted.

"No, Emil, that's enough," she said loudly. "I won't have it. I'm as bored by your Jewish conceit as I am by the Nazis. You are all mad. Since yesterday I am a Socialist. I have decided. It's the only sensible idea—everyone to be alike, no rich, no poor—no understudies. Ha, that's what I believe!"

Andreas had black eyes, slightly protrusive. They were quick; they sought in people for flaws, errors of taste, weakness. To discover them stiffened him in his self-esteem. He was easily offended. He had been offended by Emil, and Lotte's outcry seemed to him in wretched taste.

"Rubbish, my child. It's as well no one takes you seriously. If you must talk nonsense, don't talk the kind that could get you into trouble."

Lotte jumped up. She was excited and angry. She ran to him and began to hammer on his knees with her fists, and he held her there teasingly and began kissing her, as though they were alone in the room. Emil got up quietly and went

out. I followed him. Therese was coming out of the kitchen with coffee.

"Don't bother with it," her brother said. "They're quarrelling—you know how that ends. Leave them, leave them. Go to bed. You look tired."

"I am not tired. I am never tired," Therese answered.

She smiled. I saw the likeness between them now, between the antique child-clown and the handsome lively young man. Both smiled as though it were an excruciating joke that human life should be what it is—an infinitely helpless, infinitely unmanageable thing.

"Goodnight," Therese said softly. "Come again soon."

Emil and I walked together down the street to the corner where he turned off to walk to his rooms. He lived in the Alser-strasse, near the hospital. It was bitterly cold. The whole of Central Europe must have been ice-bound, a dry frozen plain under the black bubble of the sky, with a few lights of villages and cities scattered in it like seeds of thistledown in a field. A lifeless snake, the Danube, lay in this field. I had a vision of smoke rising at the far side of the plain, of disciplined hordes, but it was like watching the North Sea at night—nothing is stable, there are no forms, no limits; anything may be shaping itself in the darkness, and it may be any hour of any century.

Emil was striding along, humming.

"You said things were very bad. Do you mean that the country is going Nazi? But Schuschnigg—"

Emil laughed.

"You're very simple," he said. He spoke lightly, almost merrily. "The country is poor, a small country. There has been suffering in the past, and now, and much bitterness spat out onto the plates. We Jews have never learned to be

stupid, and the Austrian workers have not learned to be respectable. The workers were punished first, now it is our turn, and the Germans will come in to watch while our own people rob and murder us. Don't talk about a country going Nazi—as if that explained something. It explains nothing. The world, I tell you, is due to shed a skin. Oh, that lovely skin—half Graeco-Roman, half Christian. The Germans were never civilised; the Russians are peasants, cruel, stupid, cunning, strong. They will come together and inherit the earth. They will tread the poor cast skin, grown dry, brittle, into the ground. They will destroy the châteaux, the cathedrals. The remains of the thirteenth century, of the seventeenth, will become a pinch of dust. You'll see that the only enduring things are clouds, birds, rosebuds. Lotte Mánes will die, you, I, Therese—even, thank God, that astute tom-cat Andreas will have earth poured on him one day. Ah, how I should like to see the new cities, the new paintings—men learning to use their fingers as I can use mine now—”

He held his hand up in the light from a street-lamp. His fingers were long and square, the ends flattened.

“You have good hands,” I said.

“Yes. Without conceit—what Lotte calls Jewish conceit—I can say it. They are good quick hands.”

From the Heinrichhof café I watched the mob of storm-troopers—they were illegal, but the police had already been corrupted—forming themselves into line. They began chanting. Their vocal cords had become pistons—in out, in out—ein Reich, ein Volk, i-yi iyol i-yi. They were poor devils of machines. What could be done for them? Must

they be allowed to go on running until they run down?—or until they hit something and break, and the grass covers over their torn rusty parts? A life-size portrait of Hitler, looking sudden and womanly, watched them from the windows of the German tourist office. Did he really give birth to these? Impossible. The climate in the world is changing, and it breeds these organisms, blind, destructive, greedy.

A March wind was whirling scraps of paper and dust along the Ring. It was not yet dark, but the street-lamps had been lighted. I knew the lines they fell into seen from above—from the Kahlenberg, for example. The truth is we are tired of these old patterns. They hold too much of the past. Clear them away, cut the bushes down if the webs cling to them—the glittering, fine, enchanting webs.

I heard a girl laugh, a warm sound. It was Lotte.

She caught sight of me, touched Andreas on the arm, and they came over to my table. She was wearing a small fur cap. Her cheeks, nipped by the frost, glowed. The dark line round the pupils of her eyes exaggerated their clearness.

I asked for more coffee, and Andreas ordered himself a brandy. He was restless. He could not keep his hands off the young girl, but touched her when he pointed across the street, and when he lit her cigarette, and when he moved. She knew he was impatient. She did everything she could to rouse him: she pushed her sleeve up to the shoulder to show me a bruise, and crossed her long slender legs, tapping her foot on the floor. I was not, as I might have been, irritated. I had realised something about her. She was as inquisitive about people's emotions as about the price of their shirts. Her curiosity was innocent. That is, she did not

expect to be paid. She will die poor, I thought, knowing a great deal about men but not knowing how to put a price on herself.

I jerked my head towards the mob of wild-eyed youths and boys, which had begun moving down the Kärntnerstrasse—i-yi iyol i-yi.

"What do you think of those?" I asked Andreas.

He looked at them with a sarcastic smile.

"Well, look at them. Scholarship students and the sons of shopkeepers, I fancy."

I was surprised. I was encouraged, too. Surely Andreas would know which was the losing side. And if he despised these hangers-on—I was going to question him, but he had taken hold of Lotte's arm and was begging her to finish her coffee.

"But why? I'm happy here."

"I want you alone."

Lotte drew her arm away, smiling.

"I'll come soon. I should like some more coffee."

"Not now."

"Yes, Andreas. I love you, but I am cold, shivering. I must have some coffee."

"Very well." He lost his temper. "I can't hang about here. Come when you're ready."

Lotte put her arm round him to keep him in his chair while she drank the coffee. Licking the cream off her lips, she stroked him and talked to him in a warm soothing voice.

"Yes, yes, my dearest—just let me finish this. I'll come anywhere you like then."

When they left she put on the airs of a great lady, smiling and bowing to me. Her back, as she moved off, was the

back of a peasant, strong, used to burdens. Now and then I feel that we may return to a civilisation that grows from the earth instead of rushing over it. It is true there are no signs of it—except in the bodies of a few women, young women.

The next morning I saw Therese Wolf crossing the Stephansplatz. She shook hands with me with an eager gentleness, on which her smile scrawled the Jewish word for grief. I invited her to have coffee. She shook her head, smiling.

"No. You would not like to sit with me in a café. But shall I show you a corner of Vienna?"

We crossed the Danube Canal to the Jewish quarter. A clear sky, blue, with mild spring sunlight, spread an air of innocence over the streets. It was brushed off when we entered a cobbled street, so narrow that we had to lean against a house to look at the one opposite. It was long, dark, severe, with bars over the windows. Therese looked at it with a blank face. She was living again through the whole of her past, and a minute or two of that is exhausting. Besides, she was all politeness. She would not embarrass a stranger with her life.

"It was too large for us," she said. "My mother had three children, and one of them, my father, was so much attached to the house that he refused to think of living anywhere else. So my mother worked like a slave, cleaning and polishing. When I touch one of the things I brought out of these rooms I know I am touching her."

She smiled. We moved off, and she said regretfully:

"I haven't time to take you to the Prater. A pity. You can't imagine how lovely it was in winter when I was a

child, with the snow and the bare snowy trees. My mother saw trotting-races, with horse-drawn sleighs moving as fast as birds. You can believe me!"

"How you must miss it!"

"No. I miss nothing," she said calmly and gaily. "I have all I need. I hope I shall be allowed to stay in Vienna, because I would rather starve here than eat anywhere else."

She spoke so calmly that the notion of her starving was ridiculous.

"But if this country becomes impossible for Jews?"

"I should still try to stay. I have a little money, you know."

"They could take that."

She spread out her hands, the shapeless ugly hands of a schoolgirl.

"If it happens I shall have to make other plans." She smiled. "Until then I shall stay. I am always sure I shall be all right. Now if you could take Lotte to England. She is clever, and such a goose. In England no one would notice." . . .

I knew that in Vienna a sour devil, bigoted, hard, has allowed the notions of poets and scribblers of waltzes to go abroad carrying an Austrian passport. I know all about peasants—I am one. And I know all about small shopkeepers: I was brought up in a small town. I knew the courage and brutality to which Austrian workers can readily help themselves. The water of the Danube is not so heavy as the Rhine, nor does it breed myths—you are more likely to meet a pike than a cousin of one of those boring females. But it is as grey or greyer. There would, I knew,

be as many bestial rites in a Nazi triumph in Vienna as in Berlin. But I was deceived—I deceived myself—into thinking it could be avoided. It would be defeated, in two days' time, at the polls. Every sober and level-headed as well as every frightened Austrian would vote for Schuschnigg, and still muttering *i-ye iyol i-yi* the brown froth would be sucked back into the earth. Merciful heavens, can even a sane man believe more than he wants to believe?

“Vote *Ja!*”

The leaflets thrown from hundreds of cars and lorries covered the pavements, the café terraces, and the bare trees of the Ringstrasse. Others fluttered from the aeroplanes droning overhead like sewing-machines. All these fragments of paper in the bright sunshine were meaningless and as repetitive as an idiot. The young men and young women I saw in the streets this morning were supporters of Schuschnigg. All of them. Scarcely a Nazi to be seen. There was something wrong. Behind doors somewhere, or in the Chancellery itself, a threat was maturing which kept them in reserve. I could not believe they had become harmless or vanished.

I was on my way to Therese Wolf's flat with some small presents I had bought to give both girls before I left next day. Therese was out. The door was opened by Lotte wearing a dressing-gown held round her and a black woollen shawl that must have belonged to Therese. The dressing-gown came apart and I saw that her body was exactly as I supposed, long and white, with small breasts and flat very wide hips. Unembarrassed—why should she be embarrassed, since she knew she was charming?—she took me into the sitting-room. Andreas was there. They were hav-

ing breakfast. He was, as always, the man about town. In his dark suit and modestly good tie he looked the junior director of a respectable publishing firm to the death.

"You breakfast late," I said.

"Heavens, do you call two o'clock late?" cried Lotte. "I can't get up any earlier. I must have ten hours in bed. Therese goes out at eight o'clock every morning to buy our food for the day, but she's a saint, a housewife—"

"A Jewess," Andreas said.

"Enough of that," Lotte said impatiently. "I'm tired of it." She turned to me. "He wants me to leave Therese and this flat, and live with him. He doesn't understand that I'm completely happy here. I have no domestic worries, no responsibility. I can live like the lazy animal I am, and Therese, bless her, looks after me."

"You simply compromise yourself by living with Jews," Andreas said.

"Be quiet."

Leaving the door of her bedroom open, Lotte began dressing. She threw off her dressing-gown and shawl and walked about in stockings and a chemise which had laddered in a dozen places. When she squatted in search of her slippers you saw the strength of her immature loins. Her room was tidy in spite of the unmade bed. A severe training in childhood had taught her to fold each garment as she took it off; she did this even when they were in rags, and before falling into a man's arms.

She came back. She had used the three-arrow metal badge of the Socialist party to fasten a piece of lace to her dress. I laughed at her. Her socialism was nothing but a sentimental impulse which in England would have run to seed in the Left Book Club; she would have yawned her

way through one volume and neglected the others. Her lively inquisitive mind only grasped what it had felt. She was a rebel because her parents bored her, and because she belongs to the generation which got its eyes open at the moment when the tide of human decency turned and began to go back.

She took my laughter in good part.

"Ha, on Sunday you'll see me voting. I shall wear a red blouse and carry a red carnation. This time we are going to settle the Nazis. Freedom! Boom-boom!"

Her ridiculous enthusiasm had made her beautiful. She was radiant. In spite of Andreas I put an arm round her and kissed her. Her skin smelled of strong soap and it was cold and smooth. The bones of her arm under my hand were smaller than I expected.

Andreas frowned. He thought both of us in bad taste. Perhaps he blamed Lotte more than me. After all, I had not had the advantage of knowing him for six months and listening to his views on how women should behave themselves. He had, too, suffered from Lotte's habit of throwing herself at him one day, in order to see what he would do, and on the next yawning in his face. She was ruthless. When he bored her she told him so. He held her by her senses, and except when he roused these she was unable not to see him as he was and she laughed at him.

"My dear girl," he said, annoyed, "you're talking like a servant, and in a red blouse you'll look like one. Or like your friend Therese."

"Whose coffee you are drinking," Lotte said.

Andreas got up. He drew a five-schilling piece from his pocket and dropped it on the table.

"That will pay for the coffee," he said spitefully.

"And for your supper last night and all the other nights? You're too stingy to take me out to dinner more than once a month, and the other days you eat meals Therese has bought and prepared. You once bought me a dress, and that gives you, so you think, the right to tell people you are keeping me. Well, you are not. I am independent. You can go to the devil. You bore me; you bore me."

Pale and offended, Andreas went out. He came back from the door to pick up the five-schillings and put it in his pocket.

"Since you think it's not enough—"

Lotte burst out laughing.

"Take it, take it," she cried. "Shall I wrap you up some food, too? Fancy if you were out of pocket by coming here!"

He left hurriedly, too angry to speak. When he had gone I said:

"You said too much, Lotte. He won't come back."

"Do you think I care? Not I!" She began to march up and down the room. "But he'll come back. Of course. His vanity is wounded because you were listening. He'll stay away until after Sunday and then come back, smiling, and begin trying to teach me manners. Well, let him try."

She cleared the table of the breakfast things and brought in a plate of cakes for me. While I ate them she turned on the wireless and did her exercises to the bursts of jaunty music. There were intervals of propaganda for the plebiscite. Breathless, panting a little, like a large dog, she sat down, leaving the wireless going at full blast, and began to talk on the subject nearest her heart.

"I'm full of plans for the future. If not more than one of them comes off I shall be wildly happy. I want to learn

Spanish and riding—a lieutenant I know promised to lend me his horse and he never did, the dirty dog. When I have saved money I shall come to London. I shall take a room in your Jewish quarter near the British Museum because I'm sure it's pleasanter there than where no one opens his mouth. I shall learn English. You will introduce me to all your friends as Mánes, the well-known Viennese actress. I shall be an enormous success. You will get an excellent reputation by knowing me. What sort of friends have you? Do you know all the journalists and Left poets? What are their names?"

She added irrelevantly: "Is there some baldness in your family? Your hair is getting thin."

The dance music stopped. It had broken off in the middle of a note, as though the musicians and their instruments had ceased to belong to this era, returning abruptly to what was now their only existence as fragments, newly discovered, of a Minoan fresco. There was a cough, then a voice. "All unmarried reservists will report for duty at once."

I jumped up.

"What's happening?"

"Nothing," Lotte said drily. "It's some nonsense of the police. Probably the Nazis have killed some people. Don't excite yourself. . . . Is it true there are no men left in London, only—"

The telephone rang. It was on the floor near me and I picked it up. Emil was speaking from the hospital. Vienna, he told me, was full of mad rumours. The Germans were invading the country. They had crossed the frontier. They were threatening to cross it. Linz was in the hands of the Nazis. The police— I interrupted him to ask how much of it he believed.

"Everything that is the worst possible for Austria," he answered, without hesitation. "Goodbye."

It seemed to me that he had dropped the receiver without putting it back: I heard a confused noise, suddenly struck down. I shouted. The telephone, that long gaping throat, had been cut. I told Lotte, and she became excited and asked me to go with her into the streets to watch what happened. She forgot that she had said nothing would happen. It was now four o'clock.

"Perhaps our people have attacked. Hurry, we mustn't miss any of it. I have always wanted to see a revolution."

There were few disinterested spectators in the streets. The police stood about in groups, with an air of hiding something behind their backs—their courage, perhaps, or a swastika armlet. In front of the Opera House an ant-heap of young men, schoolboys, a few women, howled frantically, like the dead gathered in the underworld and still unable to speak with human voices. We made our way by side-streets to the Stephansplatz—another ant-heap, dominated by the cathedral. I had made Lotte take off her badge. The sight of these idle police alarmed me more than anything else.

Lotte's theatre was not far from here. We went into the back room of a small restaurant and ate—I forget what. The food had no taste. We had swallowed so much insanity and hatred on the way here that our tongues were dry. Lotte complained of her throat. She ate a few mouthfuls and burst into tears.

"Shall I take you home?"

No, she must go to the theatre even if there were no performance. Recovering, she began to laugh at herself. She bragged.

"I'm not afraid. All those idiots. It's nothing. You'll see—in the morning it will look exactly like every other morning. Come to breakfast."

I thought I had better go to the flat and see whether Therese had reached home safely. Dusk had thickened in the streets. I had every anxiety that one has when waiting to hear of a death, and I was excited. The quiet in the Mariahilfer-strasse made me fear I was missing something.

Therese was in. She was alone. With her usual calm she told me I had missed Schuschnigg's farewell speech on the wireless. Everything was true, treachery, invasion, unless I had heard any good news. That only would be a lie.

She had put her apron on and was making coffee when a violent knocking began on the door.

Without haste, she put the pan down on the stove.

"It is better for me to answer it," she said.

The two storm-troopers who came in were both armed. One was a little drunk: the other and younger looked round him awkwardly and seemed not to know what to do with his rifle. He hung back while the first asked sharply:

"Who lives here?"

"I do. Therese Wolf."

"Who is this, then?"

"An English friend who has just come in to supper."

Therese spoke quietly, as though she were unmoved. There were no marks of fear in her voice or her face. She was polite and gentle, but not at all humble.

"We're not afraid of the English."

I did not speak. Above all, I was anxious to avoid a row, which could be made the excuse for arresting her. Not that they would need an excuse if they had come for that. I did not believe they had. I was right.

"Where is the other woman—Mánes?"

"She is out."

"On the streets?"

"She is out," Therese repeated.

"It's her we're after. If you tell us where she is—"

Therese shook her head, slowly.

"I can't tell you where she is. She's not here, and she may not be coming back."

The younger storm-trooper leaned forward and said in a steady reproachful voice:

"You wouldn't tell us lies, would you?"

It seemed he would be shocked if he thought she was lying. He had perhaps had a careful upbringing; he wanted as many known points of morality as possible to remain in their places at a time when torture, theft, violence were becoming usual, and when everything that authority speaking with the voices of his parents had taught him was indecent it now, in an official voice, called decent and heroic. Or perhaps like most people he was illogical and simple, and he remembered—at the very moment when, at the order given, he was prepared to play some cruel trick on a Jew—that it is wrong to lie.

Therese this evening was fortunate. Either because there was a foreign witness, or they were inexperienced and did not know how far they could go, the two were content to search the flat, not very thoroughly, but not without making Therese wince when a boot scratched the front of her father's desk. After half an hour of this they took themselves off.

"You'll see us again, you."

Therese did not look up. She was on her knees to the desk. When she heard the door shut she got up clumsily.

"You must go and fetch Lotte," she said. "They won't come again tonight and we shall have time to pack her things. I shall be all right alone. Don't wait for the play to end. You can say that someone, her sister, is dying. She hasn't a real sister, so if it is bad luck to say it, it will come to me. While you're gone I'll make the coffee."

The streets between the Ringstrasse and the Danube were solid with people going through all the stages of moral drunkenness: lorries filled with armed storm-troopers and police tried to force a way through, hooting ceaselessly; you had to be leaning against the lorry to hear it, so much hysterical screaming and calling on the name of the Leader drowned every other sound; it would have been very like the victory scenes in London in June 1919 if, mingling with the rest, there had not been that yell of "Kill the Jew," so familiar that we have forgotten who first raised it; women, uglier in their immodesty than men, pressed themselves against any person they touched; I saw one decently dressed Brünnhilde, her mouth held wide open, hiccoughing a stream of words she cannot have learned—they must have bred in her, like black flies.

I tipped a stage-hand to take me straight to the draughty hole of a room which Lotte shared with the other nobodies of the caste. The play was still going on, although three-quarters of the audience had left. She changed her clothes quickly and came with me. I had told her that Therese needed her.

In the flat Therese had made coffee and sandwiches, packed some clothes for Lotte, and already knew where she must go and hide until they could make plans. Lotte agreed to everything. All the airs she had always given herself with her friend, treating her as a child, because she was twenty

and knew men, and simple Therese was scarcely eighteen, dropped off. Therese was now the elder and wiser. None of us remembered that as a Jew she might be in danger herself. I had just heard all those yells, but I did not think they were meant for Therese Wolf. Who would touch a young woman so sure of herself, so unassumingly calm, and with that smile?

Lotte was to go by train in the morning to a village in the Wiener Wald where a friend had a cottage. It was unlikely that anyone who knew her would see her go. No one would know where to look for her, she would be safe for at least a few weeks.

"Perhaps you would like to go with her?" Therese said, smiling. "Vienna, perhaps, will not be very pleasant."

But I had overstayed now by several days the time I could spend in Vienna. I said I would wait one more day and see Andreas, who would be able to help Lotte through his family better than anyone, and then I must go.

I saw Andreas the next morning, after Lotte had gone. He had turned himself overnight into a Nazi. I put on a worried face and asked him if he had any idea where Lotte was. He looked disgusted and said:

"In prison, I hope, with the other Red scum."

I was as much surprised to find that people actually use these phrases as I was by his meanness. More surprised. It rarely startles me when a man turns out to be a scoundrel, but I am always astonished and incredulous to hear any well-brought-up human being use vulgar meaningless words. The words scrawled inside public lavatories are often rich in meaning, and it would be less shocking to use them than to keep in circulation so much base metal, worth nothing.

I went back to Therese. She had just come in. Since eight o'clock she had been trying to find her brother. No one had seen him since four yesterday afternoon, when three S. S. guards forced their way into the hospital and dragged him out. She had even been to the headquarters of the S. S.

"My dear Therese, why do you do these things?" I cried. "It will do Emil no good for you to be insulted or—"

She interrupted me.

"I am all right." She made an awkward gesture of her hands. "Besides, it is not important."

Wearily, forcing herself to smile—since it was not natural, there was only friendly gaiety in her smile—she asked me if I would like cakes for my journey. I refused. She was still anxious to give me something. She said reassuringly:

"Don't worry about Lotte. She's strong and I shall look after her. And you must come back one of these days, when we are less upset. I've been thrown out of my time today. Usually I do my shopping early, to have time for the other things, my elocution lesson, the mending—" She smiled, this time like herself. "Did you notice that they've already put notices on the parks and museums—*Jews are not wanted here?* It's not like us Austrians to be so punctual."

I was so certain of her safety that when, in July, I came back to Vienna for a week I waited two days before going to see her.

Vienna had become a provincial city. What the war, the break-up of the Empire, poverty, had not succeeded in doing, the German invasion did at a blow. Only the outer structure was intact: the streets, loyally renamed for the murderers of Dolfuss; the University, from which all but second-rate or submissive teachers had been locked out,

to fasten ignorance and submission upon the new generation; the Ring gardens from which two rash or half-witted Jewish children were being chased as I walked in—there was nothing for me to do but turn round and come out, to avoid being infected with a mean cruelty; the Ring cafés, where at any hour of the day or evening I could choose among a dozen empty tables without annoying the hapless mob of ghosts; the shops vulgarised by notices announcing that they were in “Aryan” hands and spattered thickly with photographs of the Leader—Hitler with children, with deer, with flowers, fantastic oil-paintings of Hitler laughing, Hitler as Bismarck. A frightful dullness had eaten deeply into the bones of the city. It pressed against the eyeballs like the semi-darkness that weighs on them in a nightmare. Life was running backwards; it took a perverted shape among the pallid swarm clinging all day long to the walls of the British Consulate. Even the climate had failed; it rained at least part of every day and a cold wind blew dust and scraps of paper across the dejected streets. There was nowhere to go, since a self-respecting foreigner, not a Jew, could not enter picture galleries and museums bearing the notice *Jews not wanted*, lest by doing so he threw away his birthright as a civilised European, mark 1938. The queasy triumph in the eyes of German officials was reflected in this dullness, this spreading stain of vulgarity, as in a distorting glass; the images it gave back were hardly reassuring, even to them. Only four months of the German occupation, and Vienna as good as finished—condemned to die from suffocation of the heart and brain. I felt on my cheeks her half-stifled breath, cut short by fear, by deceit.

One morning I had gone into the Heinrichhof, driven in

by a sudden downpour. A woman's harsh querulous voice said:

"I always thought Vienna was a gay place. Why, I'd a hundred times rather be at home, even if we have only one street and two churches. It's as dead here as do-nothing."

I looked round. The middle-aged blonde wife of a German officer was nagging at her husband, who had nothing to say in self-defence. He noticed I was listening and thankfully shut her up.

A rich crop of knowledge and culture could be expected this autumn from the Jewish cemetery outside Vienna.

This morning I knew I was a coward. I was certain of Therese's safety because if she were not safe I should be forced to watch her being crushed between her own country and all the others which would reject her. I should not be able to do anything.

A woman, perhaps the landlady, was leaving the house when I reached it. I asked whether Miss Wolf still lived there. The woman hesitated.

"Do you know her?"

"Of course. I've come from England to see her."

"Oh, then, it's all right. I was afraid—I didn't know—you see, the authorities—"

I left her still trying to find a way out of her unauthorised kindness and ran up the stairs. Therese opened the door. Her smile welcomed me as though I had been expected. It was the same eloquent smile, underscored by humour and anguish. I think she exaggerated the first a little now: of the second she was as unconscious as a child of the death which has been born with it.

"Come in, please. I am so happy."

She opened the door of the sitting-room. I blinked, trying to recover the room I had expected. This one was empty, except for a chair and some rough boxes. These had been carefully arranged. The unfaded patches of wallpaper had each a wooden box pushed close to it, and if I had remembered the room clearly enough I could have guessed which absent piece of furniture was represented by a case holding cups and saucers, or the one with books, or that on which ink, a pen, and a sheet of paper were neatly laid out. Therese was smiling and apologetic.

"I am so sorry. It's not comfortable. The Nazis took everything. They brought a lorry when they had seen how much there was, and cleared the place. They weren't rough. One of them said, 'Now you will have less to keep clean.' And another gave me back the miniature of my father and a dozen of his books."

"And the next day—" a man's voice from the bedroom—"a policeman called on us and made us sign a paper to say we had been robbed by Communists in storm-troopers' uniforms—we had recognised them by their villainous foreheads and the smell of Russian leather they left behind."

Emil came out. He was unshaven and stooping. Above the hollows into which his cheeks had fallen his eyes shone with their proper brilliance. They might have been watching through an undergrowth of branches. He wore gloves.

To avoid shaking hands with me he went straight to the door into the hall and slammed it.

"My sister has the most extraordinary habits. She will talk to you, even in the street, and without looking round, about the Nazi terror. She either can't or won't learn to call things by their new names. One of these days she'll get a sharp lesson."

He spoke humourously, as of an incorrigible child, to whom nothing sad is going to happen.

"Make some coffee, please, Therese."

She went away, with a glance at me, more trustful than I deserved. Hadn't I almost left Vienna without seeing her? Emil seated himself on one of the cases.

"Please take the chair. Nonsense, you are the guest. I don't mind this room. It exasperates me less than one which hadn't altered would do. It's Therese who suffers. It is her own fault. All the things she brought here from our parents' house, the pictures, the chairs and tables—she never thought of them as put here to serve her, but as things to be served and kept safe by her in their proper place. She must feel—oh, I don't know."

He laughed.

"Have you been—what is the word?—investigating?"

"No," I said.

"Good. But why don't you? Imagine yourself in the seventh century, the tenth. The twentieth B.C. Choose your own, but take care to choose one in which tolerance and justice are unheard of—unless as crimes punishable by death. Imagine you are entering a town on the heels of Goths or Burgundians or what not. It's not true that thousands of people in Austria have been robbed of everything. That thousands are slowly dying of hunger. That the prisons are crowded with people charged with having been born. That others have been existing for weeks on a rotten boat in mid-Danube. It is not true that the postman is authorised to demand a hundred marks for a package containing the ashes of your son, he who was taken away last week by enemies who were amused by your tears. It is not true that when they have forbidden a Jew to work, and

knowing that no country will admit him have ordered him to leave at once, officials answer the impudent question, 'What am I to do?' by the retort, 'There is always the Danube.' There always is the Danube. It is not true that—that—"

He took his gloves off.

"It is not true that they broke the fingers on both my hands—in two, three, places. For fear a bone was left fit to work with."

I looked at his hands. They were deformed roots, objects such as children frighten one another with when they find them in the soil. Discoloured and eaten by the acid used to wash them before the actual breaking, pieces of dry flesh, not hands. Neither nails nor the marks of nails.

"What am I to say?"

"Nothing. Say nothing."

"You must come to England. There are surgeons who—"

He smiled almost kindly.

"You forget I was a surgeon."

"At least in England you will be safe," I said, "you and your sister."

"And you will arrange to take us there?" he said drily. "No doubt you have called at your Consulate and seen how easy it is for a Jew without money to enter England."

I was silent. Emil blushed.

"Excuse me. I forgot how many the English have rescued. I am forgetting your goodness. You cannot save everyone."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Please allow me to come closer to you. Excuse me—my breath is sour. I will hurry. . . . Therese can go to Prague—it can be arranged. In a few days I shall kill myself. So far I've

hesitated to do it, because I believed that no one except myself, not a soul in the world, understood the full meaning of the word 'human.' It was a discovery of my own, and if I hanged myself or dropped into the Danube this great discovery would die with me. But during the last few weeks I've been realising what conceit, what an unbelievable conceit, I have been guilty of. To forget—how could I forget it?—that tens of thousands have made the same discovery. It is not even new. I have no knowledge to leave, no memories these haven't shared, no knowledge they don't share wholly, no secret. So next week—when I have put a few things in order—I shall depart."

He spoke in a matter-of-fact voice, without feeling. His only feeling was one of embarrassment in having to breathe in my face when he whispered. I saw that he was really indifferent to everything else. Even the sight of his hands no longer stirred in him any but a mild regret, the regret an old man might feel for a misdeed committed in his childhood. I did not try to dissuade him from killing himself. What was the use? He was already at the end of his life.

He pulled his gloves on. A mechanical impulse made him smooth each finger separately. He heard Therese open the door of the kitchen and pretended to show me a book. I believe he was indifferent to her, too: he was anxious to avoid a recurrence of feeling in any part of himself.

She came in smiling and anxious, with the coffee.

"We have no little cakes of the kind you like."

"What a pity," I said.

"But you would like some coffee? And I am sorry—I should have told you about Lotte. She is in Prague. She had a friend in the Czech legation and he was able to help her. I should have told you at once."

I knew already that Lotte was in Prague. She had written to me. I said nothing, however. I had no wish to lessen Therese's pleasure in having something, if it was only news of her friend, to give me in place of the missing cakes.

She was wearing the dress I had first seen her in, but for some reason she had lengthened it—the mark of the old hem was still there. It now came over the top of her boots. Perhaps she thought she was adding dignity to her few years. She held herself very badly, and I saw that she would let herself grow ungainly as she grew up. In her extreme simplicity and her secret pride she would never notice it. Her features would become blunter, her skin more sallow. The angles of her immature body—at which she never looked—were still charming, but in time she would only be finger-marked with beauty, round the mouth, the eyes, the forehead. True, these finger-marks would be worth as much as a Rembrandt. More—since if she married and had children they would reappear again and again in the features of the race. They would last as long as the few, the very few objects we can pride ourselves on—our discovery of pity, our scepticism, and a habit of cooking our food which can lead to such triumphs as those of M. Burtin at Mâcon.

Without seeming to do it Therese prepared her brother's coffee so that he had no need to hold a spoon. An unobtrusive gesture removed the thread that was annoying him on his sleeve and which he could not grasp.

"Has he told you our plans?" she asked calmly.

"Yes—no, I don't think so."

"It was really my plan, but Emil agrees. I have a gold watch still, my mother's. It was being mended when the Nazis came, and I left it in the shop for three weeks—I was

afraid to go for it. And when I went, the man—you know, he's only an old clock-mender—said, 'I was hiding it for you.' Well, I left it there. He is going to sell it for me when I tell him, and we shall buy winter sports clothes and skis for Emil. As soon as the snow has been falling long enough for it to be at its best, perhaps in January, he'll join a skiing party in the Tyrol, and one day he'll discover a place where the guards—they have telescope sights on their rifles, you know—have gone off duty. And before they come back he'll be in Italy. Think of it! He's always wanted to see Italy."

"Ever since I was two years old," Emil said, "when someone told me that if I was in Venice my chair would be floating on water."

Rain started again as I was crossing the Michaeler-Platz after lunch. I dived into the church to get out of it. It was almost dark in there. A service was going on. I listened for a few minutes to the sermon offered by an old priest. He had a gentle almost inaudible voice. It was not weak. On the contrary, every tone in it was precise. It was simply that he was old and needed to husband his strength. He was admonishing his listeners—a handful of women and myself—against pride. A young woman, he said, might feel proud of her looks, of being about to marry, but she must remember that in marriage only humility could save her from mistakes and sorrow, and she would grow old, and pride, if she had been proud, would mock her. Or one might be tempted to feel pride even in suffering. One might run forward with one's suffering, expecting to be praised for it, expecting even the Son of God to praise us. But the Son

would say to us, 'My child, my daughter, what is your grief beside Mine?' And he will show His Hands to us, and say . . .

One day in September, when I was in Paris, I got a letter with a Budapest postmark. It was from Lotte Mánes.

"I have not written to you for so long, because I have not been able to choose between the young women who might write this letter. One day I am happy. I attend a meeting of workers, they are being starved, their Jewish employers pay so little, you spend your life cutting out shirts without the money to buy one. I shout with them; I throw myself into the movement. Now, now, at last I am at peace. And the next day I stretch my neck in front of the rich shops. I am almost crying to think I shall never possess that crimson dress and that tea-gown. If it were only a question of a dress—well, I would risk it and buy it. But underclothes belong with the dress—and mine are shocking. And yet of course I have enough to wear, in fact two or three nice dresses which are absolutely unnecessary.

"What is happening to me? I begin to feel at home in no world. I despise the rich and yet I long to go with them.

"When I was fifteen I tried to make up my mind about God. I racked my brains, and after a few weeks I was as lost as ever. I envied the Catholics then. Now I envy the Communists, but I can't join them. They bore me. They have no curiosity. And I can't submit myself to obey orders, always orders. I couldn't resign myself to living poor all my life, either.

"I begin to suffer from the fact that I am both enquiring and a parasite. For the first time I feel uprooted—a coward. Still, I have enough sense left to realise that it would be just as cowardly to try to buy a conscience by joining some political party. I want to live as a member of an honest community, but where can I find it? I'm not naïve enough to imagine that the Communists are honest. In fact, they are shocking—though not worse in Budapest or in Prague than anywhere else.

"What a pity I'm not a great actress! Then I could say, 'Ha, I am above parties.'

"Did you hear that Emil Wolf is dead? He killed himself, stupid fellow.

"Therese is in Prague. I left her there in July when I came to Budapest with—yes—with an American lawyer who is studying Europe. He is fifty-three, kind, innocent, almost a virgin. I don't mean he has never had other women. He has had five or six. I questioned him about them, which shocked him at first, and then he enjoyed talking to me about them and about his life in—I forget where, it seems the United States is a large country. But he has obviously never known any of them; he never talked to them; he learned nothing. He knows nothing, nothing. I feel to him like his mother. I don't love him in the least, but— isn't it strange?—I feel myself full of tenderness for him. It is the first time such a thing has happened to me with any man, yet I loved the others. He has a kindly good face. The thought of his wife and what she would feel if she knew he has had a mistress worries him. Yet he doesn't respect her. He adores her. Once he said to me, 'If you were my brother I should be fond of you,' then blushed as though what he had said was shock-

ing. Are all Americans so ignorant, so afraid of feeling and thinking, so—so undeveloped? He makes me feel old—and yet full of energy, as though I could conquer the world if I had time.

“Ah, if I had time.

“He, my American, says what is happening between Hitler and the Czechs is serious—events and statistics are the only things he finds serious and important. What happens when one is born, or when one dies or loves someone, isn’t serious at all! He says there will either be war or Hitler will destroy Czechoslovakia. Whichever it is, he thinks it is dangerous for me to go back to Prague.

“I must go back. I can’t leave Therese there alone if there is danger.

“To comfort him I have said I won’t go. But I have made my plans. Tomorrow when he goes to Pécs on business, I am leaving for Prague. I shall leave a little note in his room, beginning, ‘Dear Harris, try to forgive me.’ . . . I’m very pleased with this, it’s striking—perhaps I am becoming a writer. Certainly I’m changing. Soon I shall be twenty-one, a time to think of living.

“How we shall live, Therese and I, in Prague, I don’t know. Neither of us has work.

“What does it matter? I am by God not specially interested in my own future. I don’t want to go on wasting my years in this no-man’s-land where I live at present. It is full of lies. It seems to me there must somewhere be truth, if I can discover it—between this poor angry young energetic Europe of ours and this old innocent America. Perhaps I shall find it, and become famous.

“Please find time to come to Prague. I shall be with Therese—at Karlova Ulice 98.” . . .

When I came to Prague in October, the Czechs had just capitulated to the governments of France, Germany, England and Poland. It was the first time since the war that the four had acted together; the sheets were turned down for a united Europe, and it was only an accident that brought about the death, overlain, of a charming healthy child.

With the retreating soldiers, refugees moved towards Prague, the most wretched because the most humble of victims. All the small business of death that goes on every day in a town, the lamb led to the butcher and the rest of it, are cancelled by the first child, woman, man, turning his back on his house-door for ever. Add up what he must leave—not only chairs, pictures, books—these are nothing beside the cobblestones in the road outside his house, his summers, the moss showing black between drifts of snow on a wall, the names of the streets, his habit in the morning of taking this and not that turning to field, factory, school. Leaving not only his proper life but the proper death towards which it was turned, he must go in search of heaven knows what unfriendly and unfriended death in some other place. Yet those among the refugees I passed on the road from the frontier who were Czechs were blessed beside those who were only Jews or Germans. I found, when I reached Prague, that these others were being turned back. The luckier were penned in camps. Others, driven into the trains which were to take them into occupied territory, had just enough courage, no more, as would do to finish it by jumping out.

It was a day or two before I was free to call on Lotte and Therese. In the meantime I had seen Andreas in the lounge of the Ambassador. He was alone. I spoke to him and he glanced at me with calm impudence.

"You're mistaken. I don't know you."

I blushed and turned away. In spite of my dislike for him I was taken aback. I have not the self-assurance of my thoughts.

I went the next evening to the address Lotte had given me. It was a street in the Old Town, narrow, squeezed on both sides by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, older than either, and dilapidated. The woman who opened the door a few inches refused to understand my German. I began my few words of Czech. Seeming not to listen, she shook her head slowly. I repeated their names.

"Not here."

"But—they were here. A month ago. Last week."

"I don't know anything."

"Tell me when they left. It is important."

"I can't tell you anything. They left suddenly. I don't know."

I looked at her. She was like women I had known when I was a child in a North Sea village, suspicious, kindly, hard. If I was right, she would answer an insult quicker than any appeal.

"So you turned them out," I said. "Did you keep their luggage?"

"No, that I did not," she answered. "I tell you they had nothing. Wait."

She went away, first putting the door on the chain. Pushing it, I could see a few yards of dark passage and one of those bamboo tables that bring Pimlico to live next door to Prague, both of them wearing an old shawl and slippers. I heard her footsteps in the basement.

In a few minutes she came back. She was carrying a

paper which she pushed into my hand, and slammed the door.

I took it into the middle of the street—it was growing dark—to read.

“Prague Police Presidency

Prague, Oct. 11, 1938

Order

to Wolf, Therese.

“By virtue of Paragraph 5, Section 2, of the law of . . . I expel you for reasons of public peace and order beyond the boundaries of Greater Prague and order you to leave this area immediately, at the latest within 48 hours.” . . .

A light noise made me turn my head. It was the Czech woman closing the shutters of her room. I looked both ways in the street. Not a light in a single window. The street at the end of this was wide and well-lighted. I went towards it. But in the whole of Prague there was not enough light to show me whether Lotte had received the same document or whether she had chosen simply to go with Therese to where Therese had gone.

THE HOUR OF PRAGUE

The right bank of the lake of Geneva is damnably like the Bayswater Road, private hotels, inferior government officials, cancers of dust and geraniums, and the rest of it. Yet the lake is magnificent. Under a pure sky, it pokes its insolent bright tongue against this city of hard-faced ideals. The almost German brutality of Calvin who ordered a child to be beheaded for disobeying its parents, the hard bargains of the Genevese, have been topped off by the League. Under cover of its ideals there has been brought off more hard lying and more cynical bargains than plain chicanery would have thought of. Ha, what a city! A city of what gods?

June 22, 1938. I was walking along the Grand Quai and a man hailed me from a table at a small café. I turned back.

The last time I had seen Sheerwater was in his flat in New York. Since then he has exiled himself from America. I have not heard of any of his countrymen petitioning him to return. He must be sixty-five. He still writes. Heaven knows how many novels he has written now, all drenched in the liberal ideals of 1890. Out of a page you can wring

enough progressive water to wash your hands, and he still expects the millennium.

The millennium ended in 1930, without any of us realising that we had lived through it.

We talked for a few minutes, in the affable tones of men who wouldn't give tuppence for each other's minds, then he invited me to dine with him at home. Just as I had opened my mouth to refuse I saw that he regretted asking me. I accepted.

He has a house in the old town—very agreeable. Large rooms, a great many pictures (he smells out in their poverty-stricken years the painters who are going to fetch money); a bouncing head of him by some wretched English sculptor; mirrors enough to refurnish Versailles. The garden is enchanting. Far too good for him. Why the devil should a smattering of biology and economics, and the sexual interests of a schoolboy, fetch a writer in hundreds and thousands of dollars a year? I despise him and envy him.

He was living, I found, with a Mrs Merrimen. Again—far too good for him. To have caught her at all he must be better than I think.

Mrs Merrimen was in the late forties, comfortably plump, with a charming ugly face—greyish eyes, bright, a wide mouth, high flat cheekbones, like the edge of Salisbury Plain, an easy smile. She had the most delicate voice in the world. After he had introduced us he stood rubbing his puny body against her like a starved cat, to rouse my envy. She took it very good-naturedly. It reminded me of S—patting the mongrel she allows to roll on her seventeenth-century Chinese carpets.

I now remembered John Clabon telling me about her.

"A charming good sort of slattern, and—if we're talking of her character—not loose."

My mind must have stepped round the next corner. At this moment Clabon came into the room.

Clabon is the most honest League official in Geneva. In the world. He never pretends that the League is as uncompromisingly direct as Sir John Simon or as incorruptible as M. Bonnet. And yet he works for it devotedly, as hard as a dog. He believes in it—in spite of treachery, in spite of the insults, the injuries heaped on it by the Governments of every nation except nations poor enough to be able to afford decency in international relations. The poor fellow is the father of an ailing daughter everyone laughs at and neglects. He will admit—only among friends—that she is lame, has a bad breath, lies, squints, stammers. But he sits up with her, smiles at her, and he would cut his hand off if it would put her right.

"I didn't know you were here," he said to me.

"I came in from Grenoble this afternoon."

"Grenoble? I was in Grenoble once with my second husband," Sarah Merrimen said, smiling. "It was terribly hot, and every time I yawned dust blew into my mouth. I felt it on my teeth for days."

Sheerwater stroked her neck fondly.

"What rot you talk, Sarah."

Another guest arrived, a Swiss called Maesser—"He is a very agreeable boy, he is something in their War Office," Mrs. Merrimen said to me—a youngish smiling man, with a pouched face, yellow, and the beginnings of a stomach.

"That chap Arnold is f-following me," he stammered. "D-did you invite him?"

The manservant opened both sides of the double door. Until now one had been enough.

"Herr Doktor Arnold."

I remembered him as he came in—the correspondent of a German newspaper (notorious—in the teeth of severe competition—for the abusive nature of its articles on foreign affairs): had been deported from America, Sweden, France, England. No doubt he would be deported from Geneva as soon as the authorities became bored with his clumsy German spying and his very much less clumsy dealings in foreign exchange. To look at he was lean and saintly. If he had been English I should instantly have classified him among politicians with the highest ideals—which never put them out of office. They breed readily in the moral climate of England. A good sort of men, for whom I have no regard.

He brought his heels together and bent himself like a foot-rule from his bony hips over Mrs Merrimen's hand.

"Gracious lady—"

"How polite you are always," she said in a soft voice. Her eyes sparkled with dislike. She turned to Sheerwater. "Why are we waiting? Is someone else to come? I'm terribly hungry."

"You mean you want another glass of sherry." He walked jauntily to the sideboard. "You're a drunkard, my dear Sarah, a drunkard."

"General Jan Stehlík."

Sheerwater, I thought, has done this deliberately—his notion of a joke.

The last time I set eyes on Stehlík he was in London—watching the antics of the League Council. Called together to deal with Hitler's march into the Rhineland, the Council

displayed—not in dumb show—every queasier virtue of democracy. A male troupe (the sufferers from hardened arteries and renal disease) put out a smoke screen of evasions. If one had no children, no imagination and no memory—as of Loos and Douamont—it would have been amusing. Stehlík must have known what was going on at the back. Yet he told me that he expected an immediate revival in western Europe of courage and decency.

He was the son of Joseph Stehlík, that Czech mathematician whose speech, made before the Austrians shot him—simply as a precaution—in August 1914, is the first lesson a Czech infant learns by heart. After the war, after his three years as a legionary, he took his place behind Masaryk and Beneš—there is an almost extinct race of *Europeans*, of which Czechoslovakia has bred the noblest living members, each worth a hundred Germans and what not.

He held no official post under his Government. He lived where he was told to live. I now remembered that he had lived in Geneva for the last eight or nine years. His duty was to relay to Prague the movements of opinion in Europe. In its peculiar position between different types of barbarian, the Prague Government of Beneš and Hodza could not afford to overlook a shift of the wind into another quarter.

He walked into the room as though it were Berwick Street on a Friday night. I imagined him there, bawling friendly indecent jokes at the old women selling cat's-meat, buying handfuls of peanuts and chucking away the shells as he walked. When he saw Arnold one eyebrow moved slightly, with insulting effect. He was placid again at once. He greeted Sheerwater, and pressed a brotherly kiss on Sarah Merrimen's cheek. She laughed. The laugh spread to her plump shoulders.

"What, you here?" he said to me. "You told me you lived in France. I suppose you've become one of these bloody-minded international journalists. Minds like graves," he shouted, patting Mrs Merrimen's arm. "Now they write books. And what a dish, what smells!"

Mrs Merrimen smiled at me.

"I shall defend you."

"Don't trouble," Stehlík said; "he is a writer, he has no conscience. I know all about him. I like him."

We dined in the next room. More mirrors, a boneyard of them. Waterfalls of bronze chandeliers at the corners of an immense table. We crowded at one end below a pair of them. Sheerwater kept Mrs Merrimen within reach of his right hand. Stehlík sat on her right. I and the Swiss, the two people from whom nothing exciting was expected, faced each other with only one neighbour apiece. Mine was John Clabon. He dropped insulting remarks about his other neighbour, Arnold, in my ear.

Sheerwater drank iced soup and stroked Mrs Merrimen's arm. She put up with it as simply as a child. Her body sat about in its wide dress; her head turned on its strongly rounded neck with a triumphant slowness, like a procession. The points of her breasts thrust forward the fold of some rather faded material. I was exasperated by the thought of Sheerwater stooping over the jet of warmth that pours from them. How ridiculous he must look between those thick white arms. I don't envy him his house, his swollen reputation, so much as his possession of this park-like country. A grasshopper in a fine field.

There was a doubtful atmosphere at the table. Jan Stehlík hummed under his breath and swallowed large mouthfuls of bread. Arnold gazed round him with a pious benevolence,

the air of a Foreign Secretary in the moment of striking another bargain at the expense of the small nations.

Sheerwater was waiting for someone to provoke a row.

Leaning across the table, Mrs Merrimen asked Clabon after the League. It was thoughtless. None of us knew from day to day whether the invalid was still alive.

He said sadly:

"Do you know, there are people who *hate* the League. They don't merely disapprove of it; they detest it. In March, this year, the day after Hitler took Austria, a Conservative member of the House of Commons, a woman, said to me, '*After Czechoslovakia* it will be time for us to put our foot down.' Stehlík, my dear fellow, if your chap Beneš is relying on the League to save him he's in bad company. Naturally these people will come to detest him too. Some of them do already."

Stehlík laughed, and cracked his fingers. "Oh, I know all about them." His lips twitched like a clown's. "Your Ambassador in Berlin is not one of them, is he? Ho, ho. Don't you know what happened only a month ago when the Germans began to move troops against us? We persuaded your Government to make enquiries in Berlin. That fellow Ribbentrop—what a bounder!—explained, 'Oh, just manoeuvres.' At which your friends in London, my dear Clabon, said, 'Ah, as we thought, those bloody Czechs, trying to stir up trouble.' In the meantime *we* had mobilised, Hitler lost his temper, and the second time your man in Berlin went in to see Ribbentrop he was greeted in correct German style—Ribbentrop thumped the table: 'What the devil d'you mean by coming to me with cock and bull stories from the Czechs? Run off and look after your ramshackle empire, which we shall crack like a nut as soon as we're ready.'"

"Nonsense," Sheerwater said spitefully, "who would dare to talk to an English Ambassador like that?" He grinned at me, showing all his broken teeth.

"Anyone but a Frenchman," said Stehlík. His body shook silently. "Ribbentrop sent for the Czech Minister in Berlin and said to him, 'Take your troops away. Take them away, I say.'" He flung his hand out, moving the fingers like a man scattering a pinch of salt. "What a moment! Oh, if only I had been there."

He glanced affectionately at John Clabon.

"The English are really too awful. Hideously superior. Shall I tell you what happened to me when I dined with a Cabinet Minister? I am a Christian—did you know? And I think that Heine is a very great poet, the greatest poet who ever lived. I told this fellow, 'If the Germans try to take away my Heine and my Bible, well, I should fight.' He was unmoved; he said mildly, 'Yes, old boy, yes, old boy, that would be unpleasant.' I was almost irritated; I said, 'Well, if the Germans came in here and took away your Shakespeare and your Bible, you wouldn't like that, would you?' He jumped up and cried, 'By God, that would be terrible, terrible.' I was angry. 'You see,' I said, 'it doesn't matter a damn about my little Heine and my Czech Bible, but your Shakespeare and your Bible, that's terrible. You don't care what happens to my soul, only about your own.' "

He began laughing at his own vehemence and said gently:

"But he is a good sort of a man. He rides and he prays."

Sheerwater was watching Arnold, hoping for a quarrel. No use. The cunning Boche—he is a Saxon—was hard at it; he eats so much that, as my nurse used to say of greedy eaters, I think he must have a worm. He is as thin as one.

"I was in Prague," Clabon said, "in May. I saw the mobilisation. It went off, I'm happy to tell you, remarkably well."

"Without a hitch," laughed Stehlík. "Two hours quicker than during manoeuvres."

Arnold spoke for the first time. "But who knows," he drawled, "what your manoeuvres are like, my dear General?"

Stehlík's face broke up into ribald smiles.

"More efficient than your march into Austria! After that, there wasn't a Prussian lieutenant who wasn't ashamed." He looked full at Arnold. "The bloody fools drove tanks three hundred miles from Munich, they were ditched all along the road. Why didn't your men take the train to Vienna or go by steamer, like sensible people?"

"To Prague they will take the train," Arnold said.

Stehlík was delighted; he had pricked the skin. His eyes, as impudent and lively under their brows as a schoolboy's, smiled into Arnold's face.

Sarah Merrimen laid her hand on his arm.

"Ah, my dear Jan, promise me not to overrun Germany!"

Stehlík took her hand gently up.

"You would make a bear dance—if I kept a bear to dance. But it must be an honest thrifty Czech bear."

Disappointed, Sheerwater gave her a spiteful pinch. A mark like a birthmark opened on her arm.

"Why on earth," Sheerwater said peevishly to Maesser, "have you Swiss fellows got the wind up? Who on earth wants your country? Unless Hitler has decided to go into the hotel business?"

Maesser blinked; he smiled lightly, rolling his lips. He had the air of indulging a rude child. It is difficult for a

man who has never been out of Geneva to form any idea of Americans except as an animal which observes, and scampers back to its hole.

"My d-dear boy, you don't realise how fortunate you are to have an American passport. Unless a bomb drops on you—I hope it won't—you can always fly home—

'What does little birdie say
In his nest at break of day?
Birdie, wait a little longer
Until little wings are stronger,
Then you'll fly away.' . . .

Charming, isn't it? I owe it to my English nurse—as well as a fear of c-cows. She taught me both."

"What nonsense," Mrs Merrimen said. The words were squeezed out of shape in her throat by laughter.

"But it's serious," Maesser drawled. "When—I don't say if—when Czechoslovakia has been taken over by Germany, what's to stop a lightning attack on France? Air-raids of a quite inconceivable brutality—f-from the Alps, the Rhine. New standards of beastliness will be set up. All previous records b-beaten. Japanese holder, m-mortified, disembowels himself. The armies will enter France through the Low Countries and Switzerland. I advise any foreigner to leave in good time—within, say, a year of the conquest of Czechoslovakia."

He smiled sweetly at Stehlík. "I feel for you. I do really. You and I, dear boy, belong to vulgar democratic countries. No aristocrats, no mysticism. No reason for anyone to preserve us. We don't beat political prisoners to death. We have no c-concentration camps. We don't yearn to acquire an empire. We don't give anyone any trouble. The result?

—no one cares what happens to us. No bishops, no peers, write letters to the London *Times* b-begging people to be m-magnanimous and t-try to understand us. Bah! Why don't you make an alliance with Hitler in time—and all be b-bullies together? If you did that, the English ruling class would begin to respect you.”

Arnold leaned forward. He seemed to be sober, although he had finished two bottles of white claret and a third of burgundy. Resting the tips of his fingers together, like a don, and simpering a little, he said:

“My friend, my impetuous petulant friend—how little you understand Germany—or human nature. It's not because we are troublesome that the other nations respect us. It is because we are lordly. We are *Herrenvolk*.” He swayed his lean body like a drying pole. “You, *mon général*,” he said to Stehlík, “ask your people to be satisfied with education, new farms, the liberty of the press—all things that can be touched, and therefore despised. The Leader knew better when he gave us the soul of the German people to cherish. We cherish it. We worship.”

“Very praiseworthy of you, I'm sure,” John Clabon said, staring.

Stehlík brought his hand down on the table with an exclamation, a single obscene word. He touched Mrs Merrimen's arm.

“Forgive me.”

“I forgive an old legionary.”

“Thanks. Clabon—my dear fellow—I'm devoted to you—I'm devoted to England. The best, the most generous, the most decent people in Europe. In the world. But why, tell me, in God's name, why are you so horribly afraid of whatever you are afraid of—is it socialism? is it

America? what is it? Why do you let Hitler go on making a ball of Europe? Are you hoping he'll turn his attention to Russia? Would you, in his place? Would you attack a lean bear with a great fat sow of a British Empire lolling in the front garden? Please explain it to me."

"I can't," Clabon said simply. "If the reason is what I think it is, I'm going to wait until the last minute and then I'm going to cut my heart out and eat it."

His face was distorted with an anguish of which he was ashamed.

"Why shouldn't you give us back the reparations payments?" Arnold said smoothly. "Why should Germany, of all the nations who suffered in the war, be punished afterwards? Why is it never the right moment to do justice to us? We waited, with our backsides in the air, for twice seven years, and let you kick us from conference to conference. Then we got up. You don't kick us now. No, no, no—you fear us."

"He's right," Sheerwater said in his shrill pipe.

Arnold looked blandly, slyly, at Jan Stehlík.

"If your Government were sensible—"

Stehlík interrupted him.

"You mean if we hanged ourselves to avoid being choked? Listen," he said to Sheerwater, with energy, "six years ago an insurance company went bust in Vienna, and ruined German firms in Czechoslovakia. Our banks—our vulgar Czech banks—rescued them. Did they thank us? Not they. Perhaps they hated being kept alive by us."

"What a mind!" Arnold said. "You think because you put up a few kroner for them, they ought to lick your boots. Czech shopkeeper!"

Jan Stehlík's face altered so suddenly that I gaped at it.

He was half up in his chair—I saw Sheerwater's mouth open in alarm; he had wanted a row, but he was afraid for his old glass. He hated to lose money.

Sarah Merrimen stood up, smiling. She pushed Stehlík lightly on the shoulder.

"Don't get up, Jan, my dear. I'm not leaving you men to drink alone. I'm only going away for one minute—"

She smiled at him with half innocent, half sensual kindness. He laughed. He relaxed; and the veins at the side of his throat disappeared.

Sheerwater had followed Mrs Merrimen to the door. He leaned there, peering across the hall. In his weak little voice he went on calling her until she appeared on the staircase.

"Sarah, don't be long. Don't run away, Sarah. Where are you? Sarah, I want you. Come back."

I looked at Arnold. He was lolling in his chair, bent over at a wrong angle, a badly stuffed doll. He carefully picked tooth after tooth, swallowing the fragments of food.

I heard Maesser ask Stehlík: "I can't understand why you're so c-confident? Are you bluffing?"

"Not in the least. Hitler may last another ten years. We Czechs will go on for centuries."

"You didn't choose a good name for your country. It puts people off. Why d-don't you change it?"

"What do you suggest?"

"Bohemia—of c-course."

Clabon was listening.

"Abyssinia would be more suitable," he said to me in a low voice.

Sheerwater had come back, strutting behind Mrs Merrimen. He ran his hand over her back with the air of a horse-dealer.

"I prophesy the end of France," he squeaked. "In five years, or two, France will be a German protectorate. The whole of Europe will be protected by Germany."

"England?"

"Yes, England, too," Sheerwater said petulantly. "England deplores and Germany marches. You agree with me, Jan."

Arnold smiled loftily. He held his napkin up and began to pick his nose. Clabon, I, and the footmen could see him: he did not count us.

How gay Stehlík was in those days; I have never known anyone like him. He was more alive than any of us. What energy in him! The hurrying vitality of an animal and the mind of an honest man of genius. Physically courageous, decent, emotional. He used soldier's language to diplomats; it endeared him to a few and frightened the others. The Scandinavians especially are very formal.

He laughed. "Of course the Germans are going to march against us in September. We know it quite well. We shall fight. Every Czech, man, woman, child, will fight. Last week I was talking in Prague to an archbishop. He said, 'Though I am an archbishop—' he had all his robes on and you could see he wasn't Pavlova—if Hitler came into this room now I would strangle him with these hands.' "

He looked sarcastically at Arnold. "Is it a fact that Hitler said, 'I am a passionate architect; I can't bear to see Prague in the hands of these low-born Czechs!' It's a good joke even if it's true."

Sarah Merrimen put her head back and laughed like a very young girl. The points of her breasts moved.

Arnold discovered his temper. A muscle began twitching in each cheek. He screamed:

"Dog. Czech dog. Liar. Blaspheming beast. I refuse to sit at the table with you. Wait, wait. Before very long you'll be in tears."

He jumped up and walked out of the room between the footmen who closed in on him; one fetched his coat, and another deftly took away the gold nut-crackers he was still clutching. In his hurry he knocked his head on the door, recoiled, shaking his fist at us, and ran out.

Stehlík turned to Mrs Merrimen a look of mischievous piety.

"My dear Sarah. I'm very sorry; I apologise."

"Enough; that's enough," she cried. "If we must all die in a few months at least don't let's talk about it now the whole time."

"You'll come away with me to America," piped Sheerwater.

A film spread over her eyes—eyes so used, too, that they were finger-marked and dog-eared all over. Her mouth turned down at the ends; it folded on itself—on her life. Her face became heavy, the face of a tired pliant woman.

"In America? I? I should be bored."

"You'll come," Sheerwater insisted.

She yawned, showing narrow teeth in her lower jaw, like a cat's.

When his guests left, Sheerwater dragged her with him to the door. He was mouthing kisses on her when he said goodbye to us. She seemed responsive and docile, smiling at this senile child. I believe she really liked him.

Maesser went off. I walked with Stehlík and Clabon towards the lake. The streets were dark and almost empty, funnels for the air from the lake. A waiter limped past,

coughing; a policeman arrested a newspaperman lying dead drunk in the gutter. We crossed the bridge to the side of ideals, the side of treachery. A smell of petrol and enthusiasm met us, and a smell of the embalmer's cloths and of what he casts to one side. The decent labours of a few men, and of young men and young women, the hard agony of thought, the effrontery of dreams. Why, what a harvest.

Stehlík halted to look at the lake.

"I must say I don't like Geneva. I can't stand living on a lake. Yes, yes, I know the Rhône is within hand's reach, but it doesn't exist here any longer. I should like to give all these hotels one kick and send them and their lake flying into the Jura."

He made a face.

"How much longer," I said to Clabon, "do you expect to be here?"

"I really don't know," he answered in a low voice. I had asked him about the death of his child.

"What, in hell's name, do the Germans want?" Stehlík grumbled. "They bawl about being safe, about justice. Yet all the time they plot to seize more power, over more and more countries. Do they want an Emperor of the World to be crowned in Munich? Then it's no longer a question of justice."

"Why not give them what they want?" I said. "It would be better than another war."

The idiot grin of the boy shot in the peak of the head. The manuring of poor fields with the agony of men and a few women. The dead woman with the unborn infant — a caesarian incision made clumsily by steel splinters of shell.

Stehlík said promptly:

"You would rather crawl back into the Dark Ages than

chance your arm in a war? Well—it's a point of view—like any other. But I hope you're not simply deceiving yourself. You don't mind, I hope, admitting that in the new German Empire political dissenters will be walled up, lose their eyes, teeth, balls; that children will be perverted by Hitler history and Hitler science; that Jews, Catholics, liberals, will be killed or forced to defile each other before grinning storm-troopers; that lying will become one of the more honourable professions: a new mediaevalism, conceived in cold blood and distinguished from the raids of honest barbarians by its use of indecent amusements, tortures, stupidity. If you admit all this, and you're still willing to become the subject of Nazi Germany—well, you have made your choice. I don't object to you. I object only to sentimentalists who talk of avoiding war without confessing what their avoidance will mean—and to others."

I didn't answer. There is no answer. At given moments a stench rises from Europe's concentration camps, disagreeable, except to certain politicians whose lungs are becoming accustomed to it.

Clabon stood still. He had a room in one of the hotels we had avoided by walking at the edge of the lake.

"Yes," he said, "the worst thing about the Germans is this cold mysticism of theirs. That at one end, and their pleasure in excrement at the other. I remember in France, during the retreat, a château near Lens, the state they left the rooms in. Queer. Very queer."

"An infantile fixation."

Stehlík threw up his hands.

"You're both mad. The whole English nation is mad. Except poor ignorant devils. You talk about fixations while in Germany you are laughed at, despised, robbed, insulted.

Why doesn't your Government speak out? What are they telling the Nazis behind your backs? Behind Beneš's back! You encourage us to think of ourselves as the outpost of western democracy; the defence of civilised people against tyranny. Is that how you really think of us? Or are we becoming useless to you, rubbish you're going to throw into Hitler's hands to keep him busy for a week or two? In that case we ought to make terms with him—at once. At once, do you understand? Why don't you tell us the truth? Why isn't Beneš warned? You treat us like charity brats."

His body leaned over, strong enough to crush both of us. Anger had sharpened his voice. He was just as ready to burst out laughing.

Clabon sighed. "I was listening when Hoare made his speech, in September 1935. He promised to support the League against the Italians. I was delighted, outrageously happy. An official of the Foreign Office was sitting next me. It shocked me to hear him say, 'I'm pretty cynical myself, but this strikes me as too thick.'"

"Blame only yourselves," I exclaimed. "Do you know what T. E. Lawrence wrote? 'We lived many lives, never sparing ourselves any good or evil, yet when we achieved and the new world dawned, the old men came out again and took from us our victory and remade it in the likeness of the former world they knew.'"

"T. E. Lawrence?" Stehlík said, with energy. "A great man and a great ass."

"Goodnight," Clabon said.

Looking into the lake—at night, the sky made a puddle of it—I saw my past. Nostalgia. The fresh cold of a darkened street. Trees breathing behind a fence, in the shabby

gardens of houses. Between two street-lamps a segment of the universe, its cutting edge sunk in the earth. Worth more than a lake?

Stehlík began, without a shamefaced pretence of indifference, to quote:

“Emporte-moi, wagon, enlève-moi, frégate. . . .
Comme vous êtes loin, paradis parfumé,
Où sous un clair azur tout n'est qu'amour et joie,
Où tout ce que l'on aime est digne d'être aimé! . . .

What a pity we have to grow old. I could live a hundred lives—one after another. . . . ‘Mais le vert paradis des amours enfantines . . .’ But not here. Not sunk in the mud, the bitter rotten mud, of this place.”

He seized my arm.

“Come along to my flat. Do you know my wife? No—I forgot—you told me you couldn't read novels. She writes under her own name—Johnson, Olga Johnson, she is an Englishwoman—a novel every two and a half years. Serious and efficacious. She lectures. I met her in New York when she was lecturing a friendly nation on a number of subjects. She knew nothing about any of them. She is at her best on a platform—persuasive, eager, in love with her audience. I offered myself as audience.”

“Do you know what time it is?”

“My wife sleeps badly. She sits up until four, writing letters or talking. She has published four volumes of her own letters, borrowing them from her friends. Her secretary has a green slip—*Please do not destroy*—which she sticks on every letter. I found it disconcerting.”

I glanced at him. His face was kindly, interested.

It was not easy to keep up with him. We climbed a dark

cataract of a street at a run. He stopped before a new block of flats, ripped open by windows. This distaste for walls baffles me. Why not live inside? Why publish everything? I prefer a decent reticence, even in houses, the reticence of the past.

All these windows were dark, except for one near the roof. It seemed to be at least thirty feet wide.

Half a million men and women, and the members of the Bath Club, read Olga Johnson (Stehlík). She also writes anonymous articles in the women's magazines. "Conceals the name of a famous society woman . . . this terrible dilemma." . . . Well-meaning and conscienceless reviewers write of her novels, "tender humanity . . . atmosphere of spiritual suspense." Surely you know the sort of thing? She dictates them.

She was lying on a couch, in slacks and a blouse made of blue cotton stuff. Her black hair, sleek with natural oils, was cut close to her head. Black eyes, faithful, intense. They seemed to be loose in the socket, as though at any moment they would swivel front to back. Flat cheekbones, with circles of vermilion paint overlaid by white talc powder. The skin of her mouth coarse, but the lines firm; the paint held badly.

She was loose-jointed; her thumbs turned back.

Almost before I sat down she began complaining about her husband. He had no time to give her. At official dinner-parties women fell in love with him—" . . . he asks me, me, to reply to their letters." He overworked grossly. He refused to ask his Government for a larger salary.

" . . . my husband, I must tell you, is an ambassador without the title—and with the miserable half-pay of a general in the Czech army."

"We have quite enough money," Stehlík said gaily.

"Because I work like a dog."

"If you weren't so madly nervous," he said. "My wife daren't spend money. She invests every penny as she earns it. She spends the hour after breakfast telephoning to her broker."

"He doesn't save anything. We must have money to live on in our old age."

"I shall die young at fifty," Stehlík said, laughing.

"How old are you?"

"Forty-eight."

His wife closed her eyes. "My head is bad tonight. I'm cold. Can't you do anything about it, Jan?"

He lifted her in his large hands and set her down in a chair in front of the electric fire. Her slippers fell off, uncovering plump bare feet, shapeless, absurdly small. Her ankles were only a little less thick than her calves.

Kneeling, Stehlík rubbed each foot in turn.

"Will you have a whiskey and soda?"

"No," she said. "No. Yes—why not?"

I disliked her for her air of suffering. I felt certain it was put on. Eyeing her cautiously in the mirror, I saw her rub herself against the padded back of the chair. She was as supple as a fox. Her eyes met mine in the glass. It was like running against a post in the dark. I fell back, unable to see anything behind the surface.

"Another whiskey?" Stehlík asked me, getting up.

"Thanks, I must go. I'm leaving for Prague this morning. I haven't begun to pack."

"Prague?" Olga Stehlík said. "Don't stay there more than a few days. The Czechs are uncouth. You have to live with them to find it out." She looked blankly at her husband.

"Jan is civilised by living in England and America. He's still stupid in some ways; he doesn't read anything."

I bit my tongue in my anxiety not to give him away. She yawned and went on in a querulous voice.

"Living in Prague would be a degree worse than living here."

"Where do you want to live?"

"Olga likes living in London," Stehlík said calmly. "Or New York. In Geneva no one reads anything except the newspapers, and every dinner-party become political. She's starving for conversation."

"But have you time?" I said to her.

"Not to speak of good works. She likes to help people by painting their rooms for them, nursing them when they fall ill—especially if it's a disagreeable illness. Neither here nor Prague gives her any chance for benevolence. My people are proud, and the Genevese suspect what they get for nothing."

Stehlík walked up and down the room, gesticulating with both arms. His body had enough energy at this hour of the morning to drive a turbine. He seemed irresponsible and happy.

"Please sit down," Olga Stehlík said gently. "You wear yourself out."

He laughed. He had a boldly innocent stare. Better than a well-tempered vacuity could do, it hid the workings of a restlessly passionate mind.

I left. Olga Stehlík never smiled, but she had an engaging titter. I heard it when I fell over a hassock Stehlík had kicked into the middle of the floor.

He came down with me in the lift. A shallow flight of

steps led to the street. Stehlík put his arm in mine and we walked down them together. I felt flattered.

A cold wind had already left the Jura on its way to us. In the north-west two searchlights slid under and across each other, reeds showing the current of a stream. An aeroplane had been caught by them; released, it fled down stream out of sight.

"What time does your train leave for Prague?"

"Before six."

"You have three and a half hours," he said, smiling.

I hurried to my hotel, packed, and tried to sleep for an hour. Olga Stehlík and Arnold, wearing flat caps, rolled in the form of a caterpillar wheel round and round the inside of my head until the skull rang. I got up at five and went downstairs. The night porter handed me a letter.

"The gentleman left it about four o'clock."

"... in Prague go and see Miss Hana Čarek. You can get hold of her at —— Ministry. Tell her I sent you, and she'll find you anything you may need. Jan Stehlík."

I asked for Mademoiselle Čarek. When I was shown into her room I was at first disappointed. She was very small, pale, pinched, almost yellow, with deep shadows under her eyes: her face was narrow and small—you could take it in your hand—and eager. She gave me a hand as weak and cold as a child's. She looked thirty-five. I learned later that she was not yet thirty: she drove herself at work like an ass, not trying to spin out her life.

"General Stehlík sent you? I am so happy. What do you want, what can I get for you, where do you want to go?"

She had an air of offering her time, strength, all, as

simply as if she were handing me a pen. Taking her hat from a cupboard hidden in the panelling, and without glancing in any of the mirrors, she took me into the street. We stood for a moment, dazzled, in front of one of those baroque churches, springing here as readily as fountains in Paris. A pigeon launched itself from the dome in a straight line on to the young woman's shoulder.

"Don't bother me," she said, smiling. "Come, we must hurry. Quick. You haven't time for the past—there's too much of it—you simply must see our present and our marvellous endless tomorrow."

In Prague the seventeenth century is still alive, unchipped, smiling, with the unconscious malice and serenity of a youth. There is none of the shabbiness that depresses old houses in Bordeaux or Vienna. You do not feel grieved for these streets, these buildings. The skin is still unwrinkled, filled tensely with muscle and soundness; the smile is never deeper below the surface of this body than is the gesture itself which turns elegance into ridicule, strength into suppleness. We crossed the river by the Charles Bridge. The streets broke into groups of Sokol youngsters, walking carelessly, without swagger, amiable young lively animals. Brought in from the country, they were already at home in this magnificent city, which blossomed with them at every foothold.

It was not that they were beautiful, these children, but how vigorous they were, free-stepping; their laughter scattered over their bodies and the city when they moved. The older men, in the red shirt, the Sokol coat flung across the shoulders, lounged like sentries going off duty. In June 1938 Prague was a young man, a boy, a young woman, drawn taut before the dive, yet smiling, unable not to smile.

"What a shame if this city were bombed!" I said.

"Even if it is made a heap of stones, and we are all killed, the Czech nation is not destroyed."

"War tomorrow isn't like war yesterday," I said, with deliberate cruelty. "It could easily blot out a small nation like the Czechs."

Hana Čarek smiled and patted my arm. "Don't be afraid. One woman young enough to have children will be left alive—there will always be a Czech nation."

She waved to a company of Sokol boys and girls who had just arrived and were marching from the station behind their band. They waved back, with shouts, laughing; they marched like dancers, the soles of their feet springing on the ground. It was as unlike a German column as a carrying stream is unlike stagnant water.

"But they were always like this," exclaimed the young woman. "They are our future—we work for them. For them—yes. And they feel proud, you see how they are proud, happy, like soldiers."

Her face colourless, worn down to a whisper among these shouting exuberant bodies, was joyous.

"I daresay you have a right to boast," I said. She was not boasting. I was envious: it was the thought of England and the children we let grow up in an empty house.

A smile brushed her face in passing. "Oh, darling Mr Esk, I am sorry. But we are so busy; we work so hard—you mustn't mind our talking too much."

"I'm a poor ass."

"No, no," she cried, "you are my friend; I shall tell you everything, I shall be kind; I shall hold my tongue."

"Stehlík will be disappointed."

I saw rather than heard her sigh. She was so nearly im-

material—immature, perhaps: her spirit had not yet had time to grow a fully formed body—that you saw the least of her feelings. She shook her head.

“No—he will understand.”

“Unless you go on talking I shall not.”

Her smile flowered downwards, eyebrows to lips. “Dear Mr Esk, you are quite right. I am sure you are always right. We will have lunch. How long can you stay in Prague? As a guest—of course you are a guest. Of, let me see, the Ministry of Czech Culture. Yes, don’t be silly. Are you so detestably rich?”

We drove outside the city, to the terrace of a bathing-pool. More than a hundred feet below us, the pool was a blue eye sunk in the green of the cliff. The warmth and brightness of the sun touched me in the middle of my bones. I ate as though I were starving. Hana was charmed by my greed. She took it as an honest compliment to the meal, which was as solidly Czech as the young women and young men diving into the water, slipping through the air as though it were oiled, springing downward, brown into blue, rebounding, the water leaping to either side out of the way of these muscular bodies. The girls scarcely less broad-shouldered and simple than the boys.

“I don’t imagine that Czechoslovakia is perfect,” Hana exclaimed. “We sin. We make mistakes. But all the time we try, we try, we work hard, we rack our brains, we make plans”—she made the gesture I always see when I close my eyes; sunburnt small hand lifted, two fingers raised in the smiling admonishing pose of a Renaissance angel. Calm, gay, passionate, wholly the child and slave of her country. Of Europe. In Czechoslovakia the *idea* of Europe lived as it lives nowhere else. *And the bones came together, bone*

to his bone . . . and they lived. Not long enough to embarrass anyone. Quickly and featly murdered at Munich, the ghost of Europe squeaks and hovers over Prague from Hradčany. The old women in Prague say that one night it appeared to Hitler's deputy in Hradčany, and scared him into his wits for an instant.

In the Valdštejn palace she led me rapidly—I was allowed four minutes before each of the more superb works and one only before the others—through the baroque sculptures. These terrifying over-ripe growths, priests in whom holiness has become evil, women and angels from whom nothing more is to be expected, since they drove all their energy into being seductive, did not impress Hana. She was firmly proud of them because they belong to Czechoslovakia—in the same way as she was proud of the Sokol miracle, the newly farmed land, the tanks, the Brenn guns, and the lavish new schools of the Republic.

"Yes," she agreed mildly, "it is remarkable. It is a remarkable face. And, look, he seems to think!"

"Of something remarkably cruel."

"Oh, no, he is a monk."

Death like the pistil of a flower thrusts itself into all this exuberant baroque life, over-blown and ready to drop. The fruit is showing itself. And not likely to be healthy. The tree has nothing further to give. Like any other society, it will fall or be cut down. When I said this to Hana she answered:

"But we Czechs are healthy enough. We are a new shoot beginning."

"Aren't you afraid the whole tree is rotten and will come down with you?"

"We are not afraid. Of anything! If we must fight we shall fight. All the children you saw today will fight. And the old men and old women. We don't hate anyone, but we must fight. And we shall win!"

"I hope you are an honest prophet."

"Certainly I am. Why not? Now I must go back to work. This evening when you dine with me I shall have something to show you."

What she had to show was Hradčany, flood-lit. Lifted up on its hill on the left bank of the Vltava, the castle, incredibly long, seeming to be pierced by the towers of the cathedral, floated in the air. The night thrust it up from beneath. It rode loosely anchored in a darkness six hundred years deep. The lighting, charmingly modest, allowed it to float forward as the ghost of itself, one body after the other discarded and drowned until it was the pure vision of Matthias of Arras as he saw it before he was forced to turn it into stone for Charles IV.

"Think that in six hours a squadron of German airmen could raze out of memory something that has lasted for six centuries."

"We Czechs have good memories," she said placidly.

Her face, too worn and yellow when she was grave, became when she smiled a treasure of gaiety. Any woman who can smile at the prospect of war must be inhuman. I said so.

"But I don't smile to think of war," she protested, grieved. "I smiled because I am terribly happy we can sit here. That we have beautiful things to show. That I can work the whole day, every day, for Czechoslovakia, and there is almost everything to do still—it will go on when I am old, when I am dead. When even Stehlík is dead." She

laid on my arm a hand as flattering as a child's. "Can a man like him die?"

"Do you know him well?"

"Oh, but he is my darling," she said simply.

Since Stehlík had sent me, Hana regarded me as a sacred duty. At this time she had charge of propaganda—pitifully innocent booklets which foreigners coming to Prague that year found waiting in their hotel bedrooms, describing the baroque churches and sculptures and giving the names of the local wines and the number of acres turned over to land-hungry peasants. If, by an oversight, she allowed the Czech Government a single acre too many to their credit, she felt mortally disgraced and sent round a correction. When she was a child she prayed to St Thomas Garrigue Masaryk. Believing that a good Czech ought before everything to be a European, she studied at the Sorbonne and in Munich, Geneva, and London: she had so little money that the days when she treated herself to bread with her midday soup she did without supper. Her work—and how proud she was of receiving a clerk's salary for it!—was her life. To please Stehlík she shortened it by a week in order to take me across Slovakia.

The service was being held in the only street of a village. We were surrounded on all sides by English and French writers who had been holding a conference in Prague, one of the few European capitals where they were still welcomed. Hana should have been keeping an eye on their emotions. Impossible. Rigid, except for a slight shudder, she was listening to the Lutheran pastor. He stood in front of a tablet—it commemorated a young soldier—with a file

of soldiers at his back. Their officer shared the clumsy platform with him. In 1918 four hundred Slovak soldiers refused to fire on a company of Serbs; their colonel, an Austrian, ordered the company to be decimated. One of the forty shot came from this village.

"What is he saying?" I asked Hana.

Her eyes filled with tears. "He tells us it is magnificent to live and hard to die, but much harder to live as slaves."

"Do they believe him?"

"Why not?"

The peasants, men and women, standing behind the soldiers, listened without the least sign of feeling. Would they have refused the Austrian order to fire? Probably. Simple people are always getting themselves killed for the ideas writers enjoy writing about. The preacher suddenly spoke in halting English.

"Do not fear, Englishmen. *We* do not fear." He smiled severely. "*N'ayez pas peur. Nous, nous sommes heureux.*"

Still smiling, he stepped back for the officer. This man, too, was obviously a peasant: he had a nose like a scythe, and enormous hands. The Lutheran trumpeted, but he spoke in a slow curt voice, like the blows of an axe, looking in his hands as though he had the axe-handle there.

"He says," murmured Hana: "'This soldier who was murdered by Austria is your lesson: all of you, men and women, learn it by heart.'"

The officer stepped aside. At once a lean tall Slovak, in the shabbiest of French uniforms, sprang forward and began to speak English with a Chicago accent.

"English friends, I love America, I lived there with honour when I was a young man. I say to you that we, poor

peasants, have no time for the things of the spirit. You, it is you who should enjoy them for us—you must keep them alive—same as we kept our freedom alive in the time when we weren't yet free in body. Thank you. Glad you came."

We left. Keeping up with difficulty in Hana's car, a war veteran, we followed the motor-coaches—crammed with fifty or sixty male and female writers—to a town smaller than many English villages. The village band met us and played us in. We sat down, the whole sixty of us, to a banquet—soup, roast goose and pork, cabbage with carraway seeds, dumplings, roast chicken, salad, strawberries and thick cream, rich cakes, eight varieties of bread—the whole grown, reared, given and prepared by the women of the township. Gallons of powerful home-made slivovitz and the fine delicate white wine of Mělník flowed down the writers' throats, the musicians fiddled outside, an acacia tree hung over the open doorway, speeches were made in French and English. Excited by the plum brandy, the writers were swearing to defend Czechoslovakia. I glanced at Hana with embarrassment. She was believing it all. Her eyes sparkled gratefully.

Swollen horribly with goose and slivovitz, the guests tore themselves away.

"Come again," the Slovaks called after them. "Come again—you are our friends. Promise us you'll come."

"Next time bring your rifles," shouted a young peasant.

He laughed; the English and French writers laughed; the fiddles went on; the motor-coaches rushed off pursued by a troop of peasant cavalry.

I got into Hana's car; we were going, heaven be thanked, in the opposite direction. I looked over my shoulder. Every-

one was still laughing: everything was reflected in the brilliant sunshine as in a mirror. It was only too bright, with the brightness that threatens rain.

We were coming into Prague by train. The car had collapsed for the last time—on a mountain road, in blazing sunlight. As we trudged to the hotel Hana wasted breath apologising; she was heartbroken because a Czech car had let us down after only twenty-two years' service.

"I am so sorry, darling Mr. Esk. You must forgive me. It is terrible. I wanted only to make you happy, I am so wretched, how can you forgive me?"

It was dark. The train was held up outside the station, the lines choked by returning Sokol trains. Flood-lit, Hradčany stood away on the right. I looked my eyes out. Any English child of one of the generations brought up on *The Pilgrim's Progress* would have known it at once from Dalziel's drawings—the house called Beautiful that Christian reached after dark. The dead lying round Prague, if they can see it through the soil and roots of the trees, endlessly, like a man stretched out to look at the stars, must be satisfied.

Stehlík was waiting in my hotel, walking up and down the lounge, among the refugees from Austria and the foreign correspondents, a bear among ants.

"Where is Hana?" he said.

"She is calling for me here in an hour."

"An hour? I have been waiting an hour already. What do you think I am? One of those old women in drawers? Where is your room? You have a telephone?"

He held the mouthpiece at arm's length, shouting at it.

you are always too clean. What? I have been here one hour, five hours, a month. You should see me—I am weak, this Englishman you have been stuffing with goose could crush me easily. Well, of course I know you can't dress when you are telephoning to me—why don't you come? Haven't you some dress on now? You don't travel naked." He threw down the receiver. "She will come."

I hadn't realised that Stehlík was in love with her. Another woman would have allowed me to guess. Hana did not talk of herself. All the words she knew that express feelings were employed by the Republic. They had as much private life as she had—a day, a week, an hour, perhaps not so much as an hour, and not more than a dozen times a year.

When I opened the door of my room to her she, who had always been so polite, looked blankly past me. She would not have noticed a revolver between her eyes.

Stehlík was recognised in the café where we dined at a long table, with young men and girls, students, shop-assistants, clerks. They lifted beer mugs to him.

"Stehlík! Our Stehlík. *Na Zdar!*"

They look on him as their equal and allowed him no more room at the table than he needed for his broad shoulders and violent gestures of arms and fists. No one tried to listen in to what he was saying to me across Hana. He had become certain, he told me, that to avert war England and France would give his country to Hitler. He had drawn up a fifty-page memorandum, adding to it, by way of entertainment for Beneš, the evidence of an American living in London, who had flown to Geneva to tell him what he had just heard from the mouth of one of the Cabinet—"The Czechs are a nuisance in Europe and so ill-

bred you can't manage them. Small nations are a nuisance in any case. We shan't stop Hitler if he goes in."

Stehlík raised his eyebrows in mockery. "I said, 'Thank you, my dear chap, thanks: I'm delighted to hear that the English find Hitler well-bred and reliable; how it must comfort them when he kicks their pants. We miserable vulgar Czechs, so ill-bred that we keep our promises—I can quite understand we stink.'"

"Surely you don't believe canards of that sort. And told by an American."

"Why not? You didn't let a Republican Germany raise its eyes, but you let Hitler march into the Rhineland, re-arm, take Austria, lie, threaten. Why not my poor ill-bred truthful country? You'll ask him to be good and not steal anything more. As between men of the world, of course!"

His eyes sparkled. I was certain he didn't believe what he was saying. I hadn't sense to see that he was excited because he was in Prague with Hana, swallowing roast goose.

She sat pale and quiet, listening to him. His immense energy did not affect her. She would never allow him to absorb her; she remained separate, obedient without weakness. Yet he had only to touch her for her nerves to turn all one way. Forced against her by the others at the table, I felt her body become lifeless on the side next me. She was only pretending to eat. When I filled her glass she said:

"But I don't need it, darling Mr. Esk. I'm happy enough."

The younger Czechs sang. They began with the new songs against Hitler, simple and mocking. Then a girl broke into one of those songs every nation learns on the day it loses its freedom. Brutality cannot root them up;

they draw only strength from it. Symbols of defeat, they keep alive defiance, courage, faith; they become the funeral songs of tyrants. Why, when the nation becomes free, does it go on singing them? For love of an old wrinkled nurse.

The young men turned to Stehlík again. One of them said quietly:

"Count on us, sir."

"Drink your beer, you fools," he growled. His face shone with joy.

I leaned over Hana. "This is a splendid country of yours."

"And we shall keep it," she said, with the simple assurance of a peasant or saint.

A few minutes from Hradčany, Hana led me into a narrow lane. Its mediaeval houses were so small that they were laughable. The lane, closed at one end, was running over with sunlight. A bench the width of a hand pressed tipsily against a house.

"It is the Street of the Alchemists. They were employed by Rudolf II in 1580 and slept here."

"Are you sure?" I said.

"No. The woman watching us in that doorway is Madame Thebes, the famous fortune-teller."

I tried to persuade her to talk to Madame Thebes. She shook her head vigorously. "No, no, I won't."

"Don't you want her to guess your future?"

"Of course not. I *know*."

"Very well, tell me," I said, humouring her. I was disappointed to find her like other women. Few of them can resist the impulse to leave a noble image of themselves with you by taking the credit for a tragic future.

Hana said nothing. Leaning—with difficulty, since it hung forward—against the house, she smiled and then tried to whistle. It was a wretched sound like a fledgling.

"It's no use," she sighed. "All my life I've tried to learn to whistle, and you see how well I do it."

The Alchemists' Street was warm and very quiet. Prague was not making a sound. I could hear Hana breathing lightly and quickly, like a young child. I was certain now that no part of her except her intelligence had had the leisure to grow up. All her fears were those of a child—that a door would shut on her before she got through, that she would be punished if she failed to give the right answer to questions. In real danger she would be calm.

"Are you happy?" I asked her.

"But of course. And you, my dearest?"

I had never felt better. The lane, the half-dozen houses, were the proper size for a child. I snatched back for a moment the pure confidence that springs from being as ignorant of time as of space. And the warmth—and the bright clearness of the air up here!

We were waiting for Stehlík. The three of us had driven up to Hradčany. He dismissed us in front of the castle.

"Wait for me in the little street," he said curtly.

"Be careful," Hana said.

"Careful? What nonsense."

He went off at once, with the jaunty step which irritated Under-Secretaries.

"Do you know which street he means?" I asked.

"Of course." . . .

Stehlík came towards us, hurrying, head held back, hands pushing out of shape the pockets of his jacket.

"Have I been long?"

"Three hours," I said mildly.

"Then why did you wait?"

He hustled us towards the car. It started. Leaning forward, with hands planted on his knees, he said:

"It's all over."

"What do you mean?" Hana asked.

"He believes the French promises and assurances. He even believes in the English. He doesn't imagine they're disinterested but he thinks they will defend their own safety. For their own sake they can't abandon us, an armed democracy, to the barbarians. 'Don't deceive yourself,' I said, 'the men who hold the power in London and Paris don't love democracy. Their privileges and their bank credits matter to them. Nothing else.' I showed him the dossiers of the French politicians who are paid by Germany. 'All right, all right,' he said, 'I know, but when the moment comes—*sale Boche, tout de même!*' I told him what London bankers and business men are saying—'There will be no war for Czechoslovakia because we're going to find a way to stop it.' How? By threatening the Germans? Not on your sweet life. By threatening us! Us! . . . I told him all this; I talked myself dry; I implored, argued, almost wept. 'Make terms with Hitler now,' I said. 'Immediately. Before the worst. You're relying on the French. Madness. They haven't the slightest intention of risking anything for us. You might as well trust Hitler—a rotten chance, but safer than trusting Bonnet. . . . He listened to me—polite, smiling. Shockingly polite, as always. Well, I could have held my tongue."

"And you are wrong, wrong," cried Hana. "If our friends refuse to help us we shall fight without them. I detest war. Thinking about it I am crying with my blood.

But it must come if it must. We shall save Europe." She took Stehlík's hand and kissed it, and patted mine. "Don't believe anything else."

"I detest enthusiasm," said Stehlík vehemently.

"Very well, I am calm."

The pulse in her wrist lying across mine was perfectly steady.

Romeo and Juliet was being played in the loggia of the Valdštejn palace. The audience sat in the garden, facing the flight of steps, the great double columns of this exquisite three-walled room. Giovanni Marini of Milan built it in the decade of Shakespeare's death. The seventeenth century left nothing more enchanting. No, not even in Prague.

Darkness was rising in the garden. Torches ran past the balustrade, as the young men ran, argued, tossed poetry from hand to hand. They spoke in Czech. Elizabethan actors must have played with this energy, this untameable vigorous youth.

In the unfamiliar language Shakespeare threw off three hundred years of mortal lassitude. Every word, every gesture, was uttered tonight for the first time. To think that in June 1938 in Prague one saw a first performance of Shakespeare. What irony that the purest flame of the Renaissance sprang up only a few weeks before barbarians in S. S. boots trampled it out. Did I guess then what would happen? Watching the stage, I could guess the moment at which Mercutio cried out, '*I was hurt under your arm.*' I could not guess on which day the President of Czechoslovakia would need the same words to speak to the allies of his country.

It was a still night. The darkness and the quiet in the gardens rose to the dancers' feet; it rose almost to the shoulders of the young men; it flowed quickly under the Nurse's earthy bawdy tongue. I saw fluttering bats.

Hana was very pale. I hurried her away afterwards. Every step in this quarter of Prague brushes through an undergrowth of centuries. We began to walk slowly. I asked, without considering her feelings, why she and Stehlík did not marry or live together. She answered that to be divorced would mean the end of his career.

"What nonsense. They couldn't spare him."

"They would dismiss him," Hana said quietly. "Me, too."

"Well, what if they did?"

She smiled. It was not necessary to tell me that neither she nor Stehlík would risk being forbidden to work for Czechoslovakia. She spoke of her work. I warned her that it was bad. The Czech propaganda was preposterous. To combat the lies emptied out by their enemies they published the numbers of new schools and roads built by the Republic. To politicians who prefer something baser and more manageable they offered the spectacle of an honest democracy. From persons and interests to whom nothing except humanity is alien they demanded respect for human dignity. Their modest reticence, their honesty, convinced no one except middle-class liberals and intellectuals, persons of no importance and without the least influence.

"If you shot Jews and liberals, or starved your peasants, and you had aristocratic families travelling abroad, you would have powerful friends. Get into your head that details of agrarian reform merely horrify countries where landowners are still powerful. Nor does it endear you to

a member of the inner Cabinet in London to tell him that the press in your country is freer than in the United States. Your disadvantages are simply frightful. To crown them all, you persist in sticking to the truth!"

"No, no, we *must* tell the truth."

"Very well, you will be ignored. Today all government is carried on by hard shameless lying."

"What does it matter? Masaryk said—"

I yawned. "Well, just as you please," I said hurriedly.

How stupid, all the same, for a nation which respects truth to have for its friends so many Bonnets. What an oversight on the part of someone.

"France," said Hana, "cannot betray us. Their government has promised. Last December—here, in Prague—Delbos promised again. We have a written treaty. Besides—France keeps her word."

"The word of a Great Power to a small one—"

"Don't try to be cynical." I had succeeded in shocking her. "If you can imagine the French breaking their word to us, you can imagine any treachery; you can imagine sane men ruining themselves and a brave country turning coward all at once. You're talking of *France*! What childish rot!"

In the last week in July, I had business in Lyons. I had borrowed a car to get back to Paris. I was in Mâcon on the afternoon of the thirty-first. In the Hotel de l'Europe et d'Angleterre I took a room looking across the narrow quay at the Saône, grey-green and cloudy. Flat shabby houses hung over the river on the other side, like old women with patches over their eyes. I went into the small town. I could scarcely breathe. The town was airless and inert, and un-

mistakably sinister. The sense of corruption I felt did not belong to the almost empty streets or the blank shuttered houses: but it brushed them. A sixteenth-century wooden house had something unpleasant lying on the pavement beside it. It was the last straw. I turned round quickly and went back to the hotel.

There is no better hotel in France. Living on the shabby quay, it carries itself like a dowager, old-fashioned but in excellent taste.

A door opened as I went along the corridor to my room. Hana Čarek came out. She saw me and gave a cry of pleasure.

"Oh, darling, why are you here? What happiness."

I was used to Hana's endearments. They were not a modern habit: she was simply giving back to the English language the warmth it lost under Cromwell. I asked her if she were alone in Mâcon.

"Of course no! Stehlík is coming here from Geneva. He telephoned yesterday—he has fourteen hours. I flew to Basle this morning and took the train. It is very nice you are here. We shall all dine together. Now unless you mind I must bathe. I'm covered with dust and anxiety. You shall tell me, please, at dinner, my darling, why a lord called Runciman is being forced on us. . . . We shall be polite; we shall make him at home—of course—but why, why?" She dropped a cold hand, the paw of a small dog, on my face. "Forgive me. You know I love all the English, all. But—"

I went into my own room. Opening the shutters of both windows, I let in a little tepid air. I had picked up in the town one of those local histories in which France is rich, the devotions of obscure men. I read that barbarian invaders of Gaul pillaged Mâcon again and again. It was regularly

besieged in the fourteenth century. In the religious wars of the sixteenth it suffered terribly. No wonder it had the air of a person violated by torture. Events of this sort, repeated too many times, haunt Europe. They appear before the eyes of children dying of shell wounds and to men in concentration camps when they hear sounds no merely human pain is able to start up.

There was a loud knock on my door.

"Come in."

Stehlík kept his hands in his pockets. He was annoyed and friendly.

"My dear boy, why choose Mâcon?" he said, smiling. "I'm very fond of you, I even like you. But why turn up here? Hana says you have been chosen—no doubt by Masaryk or my father—to be her friend: she remembers both of them in her prayers, my father talked to her when she was a little girl; she adores him. She may be right. All the same, I could do without you."

I apologised humbly. Stehlík recovered his good humour at once. He invited me to dine with them. When I refused he flung his arms round me, dislocating my neck, and forced me along the corridor to the stairs.

The dinner was superb. Neither the Chapon Fin at Bordeaux nor the restaurant at Vienne—high-water marks of cooking in France—can put on a finer meal. Yet the Guide Michelin gives the hotel only two stars. It is a frightful injustice. The fish was cooked in a magnificently simple sauce—signed by a touch of garlic. We finished with raspberries and thick fresh cream, white strawberries, peaches, tiny grapes, pears; two creams, a chocolate and a vanilla; a delicious *gâteau maison*; ices. Too happy to make up her

mind, Hana tasted each in turn. A trace of colour had come into her cheeks. Happiness drove out of her mind the just fears she felt for Czechoslovakia, no less in danger now from her friends, who were afraid, than from Hitler. She was radiant. I wanted to save her from knowing anything but gaiety and kindness. She overflowed with both, and with a goodness nothing could spoil—not even treachery.

After dinner I left them and went out. There were trees along the edge of the Saône and a few street-lamps. The darkness was alive with white moths. Cloudy circles of moths whirled ceaselessly round each light: moths lay in thick deep drifts against the wall of the hotel above the lighted doorway. Moths fluttered against my face at every step I took under the trees along the dark glassy river. They caught in my hair—fine, almost impalpable, like the movement of breath from millions of invisible mouths.

It was unpleasant, and I went back to the hotel. The night was stifling. I threw open the shutters and undressed in the dark. Leaning from a window, I looked down on the glass roof of the hotel doorway. It was heaped a foot deep with dead and dying moths—long slender bodies, the wings transparent, covered with a network of fine veins, like the skeletons of leaves. A ceaseless whispering sound came from them. The ironwork was thickly matted with cobwebs, generations of cobwebs; drifts of dead moths clung to them; single strands became necklaces of dry pale-veined wings. More moths sprang up wherever the darkness thinned into light, rushing through the weak patches of light into the darkness between the street-lamps. The slight perpetual noise they made filled me with the same peculiar uneasiness as the town itself.

In the morning I sent a note up to Stehlík's room, to tell him I was leaving. The chambermaid brought a message—the gentleman would like to see me. I went up. Hana, dressed, was folding a few things into her bag. Stehlík paced up and down the room, grumbling with a sour face. He lifted Hana up and held her against his body.

"Give everything up. Stay here, stay with me."

I saw that he meant it. He was suffering.

"Don't waste my time," Hana said calmly. She turned her head. "Tell this fool these aren't the times for this sort of thing," she said to me.

Stehlík let her go. He was ashamed, like a bear which has been thrashed.

"Why should you love me? I have hardly anything for you—neither money nor intelligence. I'm not my father."

She sprang round at him. "I don't care anything about your father. Of course I love you. I adore you."

"But you won't stay."

"Ah, my love, my love." She soothed him like a child. "You know you would hate me if I kept you."

"When all this—bloody trouble is over," Stehlík began.

"Yes, yes, when it is over," she answered, sighing.

He watched her, hands resting on his hips. His thoughts displeased and excited him.

"There will be war. At first we shall be beaten. In two years, in a year, we shall win. Thank God, I shall be a soldier again." He rolled his eyes. "How the devil shall I squeeze myself into a uniform? With this stomach."

Hana put her arms round him from behind. "I love your stomach."

He turned round swiftly, and embraced her. "Oh, you love my stomach!" he shouted.

"Neither of you is sane. You're impossible," I said. Irritated, I left them.

A few minutes later, when I had succeeded in starting up my car—it was a depraved brute of a Fiat—Stehlík came out. He put his round close-cropped head under the hood.

"You are her friend? She is my life. Be good sometimes for her."

"What can I do?"

"I don't know. . . . Write to her. I don't—it's no use." He repeated gently to himself: "Je suis foutu, foutu."

"Very well."

Stehlík was ordered to Paris. He sent for me in the middle of August and asked me to work for him—he didn't know for how long. Until the crisis finished or had turned to war. He wanted a confidential secretary. He had thought of me because I knew Hana; he had orders to telephone her every evening. She would sort his news and pass it to the right departments.

"You'll telephone when I'm not free. It will please her if she hears your voice."

When he spoke to her himself he was harsh and impersonal. There were no stumbles into intimacy. After I had listened for a few minutes I realised that he had no need to speak gently; the sharpest tones he could find were those of a lover; when he used the name of a town or a military depot he had touched her hand, and a message about Litvinov and the Russian air force was a *Christ, that my love were in my arms*. I was between two people who had no further need of kindness to prove to each other that they were in love. They were absolutely sure of each other, honest, contented, truthful.

Hana telephoned:

"Runciman continues to spend his weekends with Nazis. Note, please, he has refused other invitations. He is with Prince Clary-Aldingen, a supporter of Henlein. On Sunday he meets Prince Max Egon von Hohenlohe. Is this what you meant when you said we ought to have aristocrats to speak for us? But for whom are they speaking? The latest reports give Germany a million and a quarter men under arms. Please confirm."

The speaking-tube hooked on my desk went off: it used to make noises like an asthmatic old dog. Mme Rucart, the concierge, was, as usual, in the middle of a sentence. She rarely waited for me to pick the thing up; she imagined me seated with it clamped to my ear, waiting for her to speak.

"...if he can't see M. Stehlík at once he'll wait. He'll wait until tonight—until the end of the next war—believe me he will wait. You should agree to see him. Must I have it sitting in the yard, spying on me, for hours?"

"But who is it?"

"I told you at first. M. Léognan. M. Georges Léognan."

Stehlík groans. Léognan is our friend of the Quai d'Orsay. He attached himself to Stehlík one evening during a reception. If Stehlík wanted to get rid of him now he would have to be brutal. He clings to us, and we can't afford to brush him off.

He has some of the worst habits of a woman. He must admire in Stehlík the qualities missing in himself, truthfulness, courage, honesty, a disinterested outlook. He is extremely vain, extremely ambitious, and intelligent. In spite of his cleverness he can be grossly flattered without feeling

a twinge. He is sensitive: when his vanity is hurt he suffers sharply and genuinely; I have seen him cry.

At this time he still hoped to become Prime Minister, but his hopes must have been rubbing thin. If he had been simply obnoxious and venal he might perhaps have brought it off, but people found him ridiculous: the *Canard Enchaîné* used to caricature him as a single waved line with a phonograph at the end of it—he was absurdly slender, at fifty he was as gawky as a boy, and he spoke in a resonant voice, endlessly. No one believes that he makes less than a hundred thousand francs a year out of the Budget in the week before the new taxes are made public.

“What does he want?”

“He’s probably going to tell me that Bonnet is a loyal friend of Czechoslovakia—or that the German army is no good. Even with me he can’t speak the truth. All one need do is turn his sentences bottom over and shake the truth out of them.”

“Shall I go?” I asked.

“No. My wife is dining out—I’ll take him into her sitting-room. He prefers airless overheated rooms. Olga—did you notice it?—has had three of the windows screwed up to stop me opening them when I go in. Just now the place stinks of enthusiasm and face powder; she had a committee meeting of her Peace League this evening. They’re planning to boycott war.”

He slammed the door. I spoke to Mme Rucart. She answered me in a changed voice. “The English gentleman who was here yesterday has come.”

“Send him up to me.”

Clabon came into the room, smiling and clumsy. He was untidy and as usual rather dirty. If his singleminded devo-

tion to the League had not ruined him before now, it was thanks to his indifference to looks. No influential civil servant could suppose there was any need to trouble about a man who wore a jacket covered with soup and tobacco stains, his hair ragged, his nails short and filthy. It was only just being discovered that through his books and lectures Clabon had infected a whole generation of young men and women, students of foreign affairs. They were all of them disciples of his faith in a federated Europe. Alarmed, the authorities in London were arranging to dismiss him. It was too late. His views on justice, the Bank of International Settlements, and land reform had soaked into who knows how many impressionable minds. A legacy of idealism in public life, of decency and good faith between classes, had been passed on. It was going to be hard to root it completely out. "Clabon?—the most dangerous man in Europe," a Treasury official said: "he must be sunk."

I wanted to warn him, and found it difficult to know what to say. If I convinced him he was in danger he would—far from turning cautious—become more outspoken and uncompromising. In the end they might take it into their heads that dismissal was not enough; he must be disgraced. It would be very simple. The more respected a man has been, the easier it is, without saying a great deal, to give the impression that he has been sacked for immorality. "There must be *something*—or why should they dismiss a man they thought highly of?" Poor Clabon. Why warn him? He should have known that devotion to an idea is likely to be fatal.

He sprawled in a chair, glad to be with friends. He had noticed that in Geneva people were beginning to avoid him. Through modesty, he put it down to his bad manners. He

forgot invitations to dinner and when he had been introduced to a politician failed at their next meeting to remember the fellow's name.

"Why are you in Paris?" I asked him.

He frowned and stared at the floor. "It's absolutely no good warning Stehlík," he muttered, "but I can't let him run his neck into a trap and say nothing."

"Why not look after your own neck."

"Mine?" His big slack body shook with amusement. "I daresay I could always get a job as a labourer. Besides—nobody wants my job."

"They might think of throwing you out of it."

"Well?" He made a gesture of contempt. "I have a feeling that the League is handcuffed to Czechoslovakia. They'll swim or drown together. As for anything else—the individual, damn it—doesn't matter."

"At Cambridge last year you told the history school that a State is to be judged civilised or uncivilised according to the dignity it allows every man, woman, infant."

"Nonsense. One doesn't include oneself in these pieties. . . . Stehlík knows—of course—that a number of powerful people in London and Paris are against his country. Of course he knows. But does he know why these people—who hate the League—hate and despise Beneš and Beneš's country? Because Beneš is an upstart, a common fellow, who believes in equality. If he succeeded he would be dangerous. Just as the League would have been dangerous if it had succeeded. Some of Beneš's enemies didn't even know why they hated him. They had to invent reasons. Hitler has at last presented them with a watertight excuse. Beneš is hateful because he is resisting Hitler. 'This vulgar fellow,' they say, 'is a damned nuisance; why doesn't he sub-

mit quietly? why does he prefer dying on his feet to living on his knees? Get rid of him!"

Clabon stopped. He was ashamed of his anger, of the shame he felt now when someone looked at him and said: "You are English." It was as though the treachery, the cynicism, of English statesmen towards the League, leaving no marks on them at all, had stamped themselves on his face, the face of a good servant of the League. A Swede or a Dane, he thought, has only to look at me, to see what a mean rascal I am.

"Stehlík must be told the truth."

"He knows it—"

Stehlík landed in the room like a shell. He was cursing Léognan—

"Worst of all is, the poor loathsome devil wants to be loved. He knows he's not likeable, and it gets on his nerves. He must spend a fortune giving meals to people who laugh at him behind his back and in the press. He knows every important man in Paris and London, and not one of them is his friend. He has no friends—he talks about keeping in touch—I am in touch with Reynaud, with Giraudoux, with Hoover, Roosevelt, Guitry, the Archangel Gabriel—and wherever he touches he puts a question. Heaven knows how many enemies it has earned him. He wants to know secrets. In Berlin the foreign correspondents boycotted him, convinced, falsely, that he was spying for the Nazis. And what a bore, too!"

"I've never followed why the French Foreign Office keeps him," said Clabon.

"No one knows."

"Ah," said Stehlík, "he has some hold over Bonnet."

"Is it true that the German steel trust pays Bonnet a salary to preach submission to Germany?"

Stehlík cocked an eyebrow. "I don't know. In any case, he admires all the more barbarous virtues of the Germans, their insensibility to pain, their naïve belief in myths, their hero-worship, and fear of being forced to think or live without the help of some chieftain—all the qualities that will make excellent slaves or gladiators of them when Hitler decides to rule Europe—and India and Africa—from Rome. . . . And what a low beast he'll look in sandals! . . .

"Léognan was born in Beynac, in the Dordogne country," he added, "but he's less of a real Frenchman than I am. Everything that you and I admire in the French, their contempt for change, their toughness and disobedience, their direct minds, disgusts him. He would like to turn them into thick-necked pillaging Boches. Then he would feel safe."

"The French won't help you," Clabon said.

Impatient and ashamed again, he worked his palm round over his scalp. His hair stood up. He was ridiculous, but Stehlík did not laugh.

"Oh, balls to the French," he said cheerfully; "the French can do as they like—we shall fight."

We were living on the fourth floor in the rue Pierre Charron. It was expensive, but Olga Stehlík refused to live more than five minutes from the Étoile. To save money, and to get the exercise his vigorous body needed, Stehlík used to walk to Montparnasse to eat.

We were walking along the rue St Jacques. A man stepped awkwardly out of a shop and knocked against

Stehlík, who caught him to save him from bouncing off into the gutter. He was a mechanic, in cotton overalls, undersized, almost a dwarf, with the eyes and snout of a rat. His face had sharpened with fury. It altered swiftly.

"I know you," he said, looking at Stehlík. "I've seen your mug in the paper. You're the legionary Stehlík."

"I am," said Stehlík. He was delighted.

"Very well, I'm an anarchist."

"To hell with you."

"Not at all. When *they* begin to destroy the Republic we shall rescue it. See? I with my no teeth and my pal with two fingers and the hole in his liver. I'm in a job, married, I have money, but—listen to me, mon général—tomorrow or the next day it is I who defend France and your country—where the devil is it, by the way?—and afterwards, after the war, we'll settle all those swine in the Senate. No mistakes this time. A clean sweep. But first things first—" he grinned showing rotten teeth—"the Czechs first—count on me. A man can only die once. Even today I can button my tunic, where others have swollen since 1918, the wretched pigs."

He swaggered off, walking steadily.

"Thanks for the promise," Stehlík shouted.

The man turned. "It's nothing. Don't mention it."

This morning Léognan turned up again. He wanted to know why the Czech gendarmes had shot fifty Sudeten Germans in Reichenberg during the weekend. Stehlík did not lose his temper. He showed him Hana's telegram: "Everything quiet here, except the brass band in the park. Playing Schubert badly. Reichenberg August twenty-eight."

Léognan handed it back with a grin of disgust.

"You arranged it. You knew I should be coming."

"Nonsense. How can I provide for your hundred and one questions?"

Léognan made an evasive gesture. Sprawling in his chair, he said languidly: "Beneš and Masaryk ought to have known better than to insist on the old frontiers of Bohemia. They should have known it meant trouble with Germany."

Stehlík groaned.

"Is it any use reminding you that the frontiers were not fixed by Masaryk or Beneš, but by a commission?"

"Bah! Experts!" drawled Léognan. "Je m'en fous—they're stupider than a concierge. . . . By the way, yours dislikes me—what can I do about it?"

"Give her a hundred francs."

Léognan turned pale. He had a horror of giving money away. He was in ecstasy whenever he could cheat a shop-assistant or a post-office clerk over his change. Since no French official can add, he was often made very happy.

The shock I had given him made him spiteful. Searching for it in his pocket, among the mass of unpaid bills, illiterate letters from women, and toilet paper, he showed Stehlík a confidential report from the French legation in Moscow.

"Stalin has executed five hundred of his officers, the pick of his army. See? The Soviet army is done for. If you're relying on it you'll be wiped out."

"No," Stehlík said drily. "We're relying on the French."

Léognan screamed suddenly. "Idiot! Idiotic fool. Ass. Bolshevik. Run away to Moscow. Why should we let you drag us into a war? How many millions of young Frenchmen died in the last war? Do you know? Do you expect us to kill off another couple of generations for your wretched

country? You're one of these stupid bloodthirsty sheep who *want* a war with Germany." He calmed down. "I have two sons," he said.

Stehlík was looking at him with curiosity. "Why did you make a treaty with us?"

"I? I didn't make it. How much did Beneš pay Philippe Berthelot to do it—do you know? Besides—it's not valid any longer."

Stehlík made a buzzing sound through his teeth, as one does at a child. He could not lose his temper with Léognan.

"Why don't you like my country?" he said mildly.

"But I have nothing against the Czechs," exclaimed Léognan. "I only want peace. Peace with order. Do you know what will happen to France if there is another war? There will be a Socialist régime." He waved a hand as stupidly limp as the fingers of a glove. "I would rather hand Chartres Cathedral to the Germans than see a Socialist France."

Does he mean it? I wondered. I believe so. He was a natural fascist, as some men are naturally vegetarians, or swimmers. It went with his fear of being alone. He hated the very smell of a democracy. Without the Czechs there would be one democracy the less in Europe—and the others would be weakened, disgraced. The only Frenchmen he cared for, the bankers, certain rich industrialists, would feel safer. If to avoid war and a revolution France must become the vassal of Germany, so be it. Better Hitler than the Socialists!

"Dear, dear," Stehlík mocked. "Very moving."

Léognan stood up. He walked jauntily towards the door, smoothing his jacket. "When this trouble is over, you must

dine with me—at Prunier’s,” he said smiling. “A little thank-offering.”

“And if the war comes?”

“I shall be at my post,” Léognan said.

When he had gone, Mme Rucart came upstairs. She had with her her grandson. The child’s mother was dead and he lived with her. Philippe was four, mischievous, sensitive, with a too large head and thin legs and arms. Mme Rucart thrashed him, scolded him for the least fault, and adored him. I had seen him turn to her when she had just whipped him and hide his tears in her lap.

She had come to complain because Léognan snatched an apple from the table inside her room as he passed.

“And on Thursday it was a lump of sugar, and last week he picked up *L’Intran* as he was going and stood reading it for a quarter of an hour. ‘If you haven’t the five sous, take it, M. Léognan,’ I said to him. I had the idea he would blush, but he thanked me and walked off with it. I was properly sold. And now the boy’s apple.”

Stehlík gave her ten francs to buy fruit for Philippe. “M. Léognan is too well off to steal,” he said, grinning. “He’s absent-minded.”

“I know all about him, thanks, M. le Général. My aunt’s cousin’s wife washes for him. He changes his shirt twice a day—to wash off the dirty smell of his money. Ah, trust me. I know his sort!”

Mme Rucart struck herself hard on the mouth, to give emphasis to her scorn. She is exactly like one of Frederick the Great’s soldiers. I daresay she has a strong black beard on her chest. I should be more afraid of her in a row than of the anarchists.

I turned on the wireless in the corner. A painstakingly virile German voice was making filthy remarks about Beneš.

"Ach, take it away," Stehlík said.

The telephone rang. I listened. A German friend of mine, the forty-year-old head of a family in whose eyes the Hohenzollerns are a plebeian lot, was in Paris. He had come with a message to Daladier, imploring him to defy Hitler. "A war is the only chance we have of shaking off the brute."

"Why the devil should we fight Hitler for you?" I said, exasperated. "Fight him yourself."

"Easier said than done, my dear fellow."

"What? You deserve him. Don't blame us."

I had remembered this Westphalian aristocrat telling me how, as a young officer protected by the orders of a Socialist government, he shot Berlin workers and their women—"Two of them in the side of the head and a third in the stomach; he rolled head over heels like a rabbit. Three scoundrels the less in the world."

I put the receiver down. Stehlík was humming noisily as he turned over his letters. He threw them in front of me.

"Reply to the lot. I'm going out." He turned down the corners of his mouth. "Olga has arranged a dinner-party with an American politician. She hopes to find out whether, if the worst happens, I shall be allowed into America."

"Would you go?"

He went out without answering. I worked for two hours. At nine o'clock I left to post some letters. The concierge was hustling a visitor away as I came back. His face was in shadow, but I recognised Herr Doktor Arnold in the lank body, cutting the window of her room in half like a dry-

ing pole. He was wearing a tailed coat, with the rosette of that Polish order which looks exactly like the Legion of Honour. He wears it in France because he knows it will be mistaken.

"Ah, my good Esk," he said in an overbearing voice, "where is our friend?"

"General Stehlík won't be here before midnight."

I saw he was hesitating, and I turned to go upstairs. He hurried after me. He must have had an hour to put in, and to save the price of a coffee he had turned in here. I was vexed. Then, since it was my duty to learn anything I could, I became frank and affable, and offered him a drink, urging him to rest.

"You must be worn out."

"Yes, yes, I am," he drawled. "No relaxation. But courage, and the knowledge that right is on our side—a brandy and soda, please."

He lifted the decanter when I set it down, and planted it at his own elbow.

"What is going to happen?"

He raised two fingers, a priest giving his blessing (an obedient bishop blessing the guns, perhaps?). "Czechoslovakia will be dismembered. The Sudeten territory, with the fortifications, will be given to us. You don't believe me? Very well—wait. At any moment the negotiations in Prague will be broken off—"

I realised that he was drunk. The pupils of his eyes had contracted; his skin, stretched over his cheekbones, had a dull sickly polish.

"You're talking through your hat."

I hoped to annoy him into giving something away. Not a chance. Arnold drunk was no less tortuous than Arnold

sober, and equally pious and lawyer-like. The only difference was in his language. He became insulting where he would have been suave.

When he smiled he rolled his lips until they disappeared. "My poor fellow, you're suffering. I don't wonder. You English have grown up used to the idea of yourselves as a great nation, a nation of conquerors. It's painful for you to watch your empire slipping away—surrendered, as the price of peace, by your feeble statesmen. You have so little tact, too. Why haven't you made friends with us? We shall be lenient if you submit in time. Look at the French! They understand very well that they're helpless. Why, they're even weaker than the English, and they know it. Did they call up a man when we Germans mobilised in August? Not one. Not a single knock-kneed reservist. No matter what their Foreign Office is telling the Czechs, they won't march. Why, they've told us so. 'We don't march.' Didn't you know? Really?"

"Rubbish, you mean Léognan told you."

Arnold had helped himself to a third tumblerful of brandy. He leaned over me, breathing the fumes in my face, and giggling.

"D'you know what your Government should do? You should send another questionnaire to Berlin. It should run, 'Now that we've given you Czechoslovakia, how can we help you to take (a) Poland? (b) anything else you want. Which slice of the British Empire would you like first, dear boys?'"

He fell against the arm of his chair, pulled himself straight, and tried to cross his knees. One leg, the knee raised, remained in the air as though frozen.

"We Germans—" he began.

"Yes, yes, I know. You are *Herrenvolk*."

A beatific smile came on Arnold's long yellow face. Hooding his eyes, his eyelids seemed to have melted and run down from the immense tallow-coloured skull, as hairless as a candle.

"All comes from us; all ends in us," he said.

"Wonderful," I murmured. "Tell me—has there been any comparable period in German history?"

After thinking for several minutes he said:

"Yes. In the fifth century. When we drove the Romans back over the Rhine."

"So you were against civilisation even in those days?"

My sarcasm did not penetrate his mind, which had reached Valhalla. He took no further notice of me. Raising his stick, he belaboured an imaginary opponent until he could step over the body to the door. He sang. I was bored and very tired. I asked him to go, opening the door and switching every light on in the long corridor. Perhaps this made him think he was at a reception: he marched stiffly, holding himself at his full height, and saluted when he reached the stairs.

"The baroness, I mean my mother, will be glad to receive you in Frankfort," he said in a affable voice.

His mother, I knew, had washed clothes for a living. She was a decent good woman, a Lutheran, and died when he was sixteen years old.

When he had gone I tried to finish my work. A sterile anger filled me. Why in God's name have the old men who rule England let things reach this stage, where the choice is between surrender to rascals who torture their opponents and a second more unspeakable war? I am almost ready for surrender. I feel war to be so vile that chatter about honour

has only academic meanings. If one could be certain, by abandoning the young men of every other country, of the safety of our own—the slim boy in khaki, one instant smiling a little, his glance turned sideways, eyes clouded and impudent; the next, blood running between the hands pressed to his stomach. After such a moment, what forgiveness? There should be a photograph taken of this boy at this instant. It should be handed to women in labour, so that they know what they are bearing. The war memorials, all shameless liars, should be replaced by anatomies of it.

That would be one way. If there is another, an easier, tell me. I am all ears.

The thoughts of a middle-aged man, remembering his friends. No doubt an anger of this sort is in poor taste.

I am not concerned to be spoken of as a sound reasonable fellow.

I am in despair at the ineffable silliness of war. The stupidity of drawing a boy's entrails and scattering a child's soft brains, in order to alter the habits of nations. If men, even Arnold, cannot see that it is silly and vulgar, why trouble about them? Why not live well and easily, avoiding human voices?

The leaves in the Champs-Élysées are turning. In the evening, a clear windless sky, the air warm, without the crass heaviness of summer in Paris. The cafés are crowded; a crowd moves idly under the trees; the woman with balloons is about to sell the last five; a child runs after a sparrow, falls, cries, and his father pets him. These Frenchmen are unashamedly tender with children.

Newsboys bounced out of the wings, yelling breathlessly; they were overdoing their part. I bought *Paris-Soir*.

VIOLENT DISCOURS DU MARÉCHAL GOERING, etc., etc. Enormous letters goose-stepping down the page. The café tables were suddenly covered with this stuff, like coriander seed. Groups of men halted under the trees, peering at a copy of the paper. A girl leaning against the shoulder of a young man burst into tears. The older women, who were past the age of welcoming a misfortune, stood about patiently and waited.

An extraordinary thing had happened. I had the impression that age had come suddenly, in a few minutes, to these people and trees. Where a young girl had been standing, laughing, in the light running through the still healthy leaves, there was an elderly woman in black. As for the balloon woman, she must have died of senility. She was in her chair one minute; the next, the booth was shut and no one there.

Now there were empty tables in the cafés. I sat down. The air was still warm, with that silky delicacy of a September evening in Paris, but men were buttoning up their jackets. Women shouted to their loitering children: "Hurry, hurry, you'll catch your deaths of cold."

A man I knew by sight, a journalist, an American, came to my table and ordered himself a drink.

"They're scared stupid," he said, jerking his head towards the crowd.

"And why not?" I said testily.

A nation which has adopted neutrality as a religion has no right to an opinion on certain questions of the day.

He shrugged his shoulders. "You know best."

"War—" I said.

He interrupted me. "There isn't going to be a war."

"How do you know?"

"Either Hitler will be intimidated. Or your two Governments won't fight. Either way there will be no war."

Olga Stehlík was waiting for me in my room. She had brought in a reading-lamp to replace the naked electric bulb in the ceiling. It had a thick velvet shade which allowed through only a little light. She had placed it so that it fell on her hair, oiled, reflecting the light dully. She was half lying on the couch, her legs—she knew they were not attractive—folded under her dress. Her Chinese shawl trailed one corner on the floor, leaving an arm bare.

I tried to recall a picture I had seen, one of Mark Gertler's—of a young woman with bare arms like immense bananas. It might have been Olga Stehlík.

"It's such a relief to me that you're staying here. Jan is difficult—my life with him is difficult—you must have noticed that. Of course you have . . . you're quick-witted and sensible. I rely on you. But you know that."

I noticed the fineness of her skull. The older she grew the more handsome she would become. Her eyes, their colour deepened by the green powder she rubbed into her eyelids, were very fine: below each cheekbone was a slight hollow like a thumb-mark. It was as though the modeller of these far from casual planes had pressed here a moment.

"If there is any way I can help—"

She looked directly into my face; her eyes seemed to fill with light.

"At present—nothing. To know you're my friend is the greatest comfort I could have."

A slight sensation of uneasiness filled me. I was afraid she knew everything about her husband and was about to put me through a rehearsal. I didn't believe she had any deep

feeling for Stehlík. She was very intelligent, a little malicious in destroying the pretensions of other writers, lazy. There was no reason why any of her novels should take her more than six months to write: the long intervals between them were due to laziness, not to a decent wish to economise paper.

"Without friendships my life would be very dreary."

"But surely—your work—your reputation as a writer—"

Olga laughed, briefly and wistfully. Her shawl had fallen on the floor; she was wearing a dress without shoulder-straps: fitted above the points of her breasts, the bodice squeezed together two fine mounds, as yellow as butter.

"Oh, no, my dear boy," she said softly. "You know better than that. What satisfaction do I get out of writing? My husband is completely uninterested. He doesn't read my books; it doesn't trouble him if the conditions of our life make it very hard for me to work." She shivered deliberately. "Give me my shawl."

A strong scent came from it. I placed it on her shoulders. She looked up at me so closely that she was almost squinting. Although I leaned over her and took her head in my hands I had no idea what I was going to do. Her nose, flattened at the nostrils, and small, was a child's. I heard Stehlík coming along the corridor.

He came in, scarcely glancing at his wife.

"Have you seen the paper? Here. Perhaps you listened in."

"I was out. Goering seems to have raved like—like a Boche."

"Don't speak of the Germans like that," Olga Stehlík cried. "It's foolish and very wrong—to revive war hatreds."

Stehlík roared with laughter. He turned to me. "I've

just come from the Chamber. It's almost certain they're going to rat. Never mind. What do they matter, these rotten French and English? What does anything matter? We have our army."

Léognan approached me. He stopped, and backed me against the wall, spraying me with his saliva as he talked quickly into my face. I tried to dodge him but it was no use. He was almost delirious.

"Russia is no good. They won't do anything. Bonnet spoke to Litvinov yesterday at Geneva, and Litvinov confessed." He swayed on his feet, holding me by my jacket. "In no circumstances can France mobilise. We're pulling every wire; I don't mind telling you. We must save our young men. The country is tired to death of war. The birth-rate is still going down. There will be no children. *Je m'en fous de la Tchecoslovaquie, elle m'emmerde.* The Czechs are impossible. Beneš—Beneš is a crook; he wants to ruin us."

A sorrowful look crossed his face. "If you had ever seen the Dordogne—"

"I have seen it," I interrupted.

He was not listening. "One of my sons still lives in Beynac. He married the youngest daughter of a farmer. Their house, a comfortable house, is close to the one I was born and lived in. That one had only two rooms, one above for the family and the one below for the cart and other things. The river was just across the road. There was an inn not far away, with a high white wall. The Dordogne here is splendid—wide, not too wide, perfect. When I was a fortnight old my mother held me over it in her arms. She . . ."

He stopped, not out of any feeling of embarrassment in speaking to me of his early poverty. His mother was a peasant. Léognan would never be so indecent as to turn her into a baroness. His one sure virtue is his certainty that any root in French soil is sound and good. It is the virtue also of France.

He gave me a venomous glance—punishing me in good time for any attack I was going to make on him. But for one moment I liked him. I went away at once.

Hitler was speaking that evening in Nuremberg. I turned on the wireless and waited. The noise of a Roman amphitheatre came through very distinctly; it was no doubt the moment when the crowd turns its thumbs down. But it could be any crowd determined on death—why pick out from the whole circle any particular one of the moments, unnumbered and innumerable, in which a crowd of people is endlessly killing something? It can be a Stone Age crowd, or the crowd lynching a negro, or the squad of youths born—they couldn't guess it—to go to a prisoner's cell one night and torture him. Wherever you look—turning back to the past, forward into the future—you can always put your hand down on some moment exactly like this. In this world of the Whole, Jesus hangs the day after tomorrow.

I know Nuremberg. I could imagine the look of the houses, the flags, the upturned faces like spawn. Hitler screams like a trumpet, with an unimaginable harshness—I mean that unless records have been taken, no one in future will be able to imagine it. It cuts to the marrow.

I did not find it strange that these screams . . . *der Herr Beneš . . . Gott der allmächtige . . . eine Lüge . . .* produced bestial howls from the crowd. The nerves are still there. They answer when jerked. Nothing can be done about it.

But the Englishmen and Englishwomen who were there listening? Did they feel they were being rewarded for all they had had to do, sucking up to the right people, to be invited to Nuremberg? That interminable Sieg heil! Sieg heil! Sieg heil! ought to make them uneasy. Not even slightly? There is no accounting for tastes: if you enjoy cannibalism, very well, you enjoy it.

It was over. I turned the thing off.

Stehlík had listened with a cheerfully impudent look. "One can't take him seriously."

"You'd better."

He was impatient. "Oh, I know, I know. Too many people—here and in London—are anxious to believe his lies. Or they don't believe him but they think he's mad and has to be humoured. You'd think that bellowing would upset people."

"You Czechs are really too innocent," I said. "You've taught yourselves to behave rationally—it was a fatal mistake. If you were to rave, goose-step, spend millions on propaganda, we should be sweating to understand you."

Stehlík went away. I heard him speak to his wife. She must have been alarmed—he talked to her for several minutes in a soothing voice. When he left the flat she came to see me.

"Tomorrow morning I shall buy twenty-five thousand dollars," she said gravely.

"Why?"

"To have a little to begin life again in America if the war destroys Europe."

"Five thousand pounds."

"What is five thousand pounds? Nothing. Barely enough to give me a start there. You don't know New York. If I

landed as a pauper, without money for clothes, I might as well be dead. No one would respect me. I should be ruined."

She hesitated. A feeling of which she was not conscious showed in her eyes, through that opaque pulpy blackness. She was nervous. She wanted help from me. But what?

"You could transfer all your money there," I said.

"That would be no good. If I buy securities and there is a war, they'll be taken over by our Government."

"Where will you keep your dollars?"

"On current account. In a friend's name. It's bad enough that I shall lose the interest on all that money. But it's not safe to buy American shares unless you're an American."

I had guessed what it was she wanted me to say.

"Why don't you emigrate?"

"What—become an American?"

"Why not?"

"You really think I ought to do that?"

I felt a malicious impulse to disappoint her. "I can't advise you. You must choose between being safe and the satisfaction of feeling yourself an honest woman."

"Oh, nonsense," she said, annoyed. "Naturally, if I went to America it would be my duty to bring about Anglo-American friendship."

"Oh, quite."

"You're so pedantic always."

She turned to go away, taking quick very short steps, her legs widely apart—like a child not sure yet of being able to balance. From the doorway she looked at me reproachfully. I was sorry. Like so many intelligent women she was stupid; she suffered unless you approved of her.

Stehlík came in, swaggering a little, with a wide smile.

It drew his lips in tightly. He had been to the Quai d'Orsay, and the Foreign Minister had refused to see him; but had sent a message that nothing had been altered by Hitler's speech—the negotiations must go on.

"What does he mean?"

"They're going to drop us. Ils vont nous lâcher—as Cambon said in August 1914 about the English. Come on, my dear fellow, let's go out."

We walked as far as Weber's. A minute after we had ordered I saw Léognan. He came in alone. I expected he would stroll up to us, smiling and blinking, anxious to find a companion, anyone whose presence acquitted him of the fear that he was not liked.

He saw us, hurriedly withdrew his glance, and sneaked past.

"You don't realise how we're going to be detested," Stehlík said smiling. "For years past, these Frenchmen—who have a treaty with us—have egged us on. Now that they've decided to let the Boches in on us they can't bear to look at us. Socially, we've become outcasts. It would ruin Léognan to be seen speaking to me. The poor devil."

At that moment I saw Léognan's secretary come in. This man—Eynac his name was—had been a schoolteacher. Léognan took him away from his profession, promising him all sorts of benefits—to clinch matters, he had told him he would get his pension just the same. This was a lie. If Léognan dismissed him he would never get another job. He had a wife and three children. He was a wretched-looking creature, lean, bald, with a long warty nose and a perpetual cold. He caught sight of us, and bowed to Stehlík.

"Run away," Stehlík said gently, "you'll get into trouble."

Eynac blushed. In a corner of his eye he saw Léognan making furious gestures to him. A quiver went through him; he snuffled and wiped his nose with the back of his hand.

"M. le Général," he said, trembling, "I desire to express to you my shame and grief for what is going to happen. Everything could still be saved—if France mobilised tomorrow. It's not the English; it's us, us French, who are doing the dirty on you. At the Cabinet meeting tomorrow they'll decide not to mobilise. I, who tell you, know this. I am telling you so that you can warn your Government. As for us—the last chance is lost. From this evening, M. le Général, France is a third-class power."

He turned round. Léognan was at his elbow. Ignoring us, he stared at Eynac with cold hatred.

"Be off."

"Excuse me, I have a message for you—" mumbled Eynac.

"I don't want to hear it," Léognan said. "Go back and clear your things out of my room. Send one of the other clerks with your message. You're sacked—don't show yourself at the Ministry again."

"But surely," Stehlík said quietly, "the fact that I stopped M. Eynac as he was going past—"

Léognan left us hurriedly. With his eyes starting from his head, Eynac began to shamble out of the room. When Stehlík spoke to him he hesitated a minute, shook his head, saluted, and went away. From a short distance he saluted again. His lips trembled. I thought he was going to burst into tears, but he went on.

Stehlík paid our bill and hurried out after him. He had disappeared. The rue Royale at this hour was crowded with idle people, strolling in front of cars which were forced to slow down, choking the street. Eynac, with his despair and his warts, had been swallowed up in this tepid water.

We went back to the flat. Mme Rucart came out of her lodge to speak to us.

"That fellow Hitler must be dotty," she said calmly. "Did you ever hear such a row? Can you understand the Germans liking it? Perhaps it's something they eat. Well, if they want a war—it's a pity. We shall be ready for them, though. And mind you, M. le Général, this time we shall have to finish it. You can't have people like that upsetting the pot every other day—it gets a nuisance. . . . But how he yelled. I'll bet he wetted himself."

"You'll go to Prague tomorrow," Stehlík said to me. . . .

Hana came to meet me at the frontier. I left the train and we drove the rest of the way to Prague. Eger, the frontier town, appeared deserted under martial law. Behind blinds, and windows covered with black paper, the Germans were already trying out the discretion that would be required of them as soon as they were received into the Reich.

Hana looked paler than usual. Her hand slipped from mine; it was like a worn coin. She talked without lifting her eyes, below which dark rings were pressed into the flesh.

"The riots began the minute Hitler stopped speaking. Outnumbered—two hundred to one—our police begged us every day for reinforcements. They were shot in the back, beaten to death with axes. The French and English Min-

isters in Prague held us back. When at last we sent soldiers, the Henleinists vanished into thin air. They are not very brave. Before a single Czech policeman, yes. Beat, kill, loot. Then at the word 'Troops!'—run, run, like hares."

We drove past line after line of defences. Under an immense firm sky, the pill-boxes, sunk into the fields and covered with hay or branches, spoke to me in a language of which they knew none even of the simplest words: a Yorkshire moor, the butts tidied up and ready, opened out to me: instead of beaters, steel-helmeted Czech soldiers as solid as if cut out of wood, lowering their bayonets when they saw the number-plate of the car.

"Now, please, you shall tell me why this good old gentleman flew to Berchtesgaden. Was it to hear from Hitler's own mouth—through an interpreter—that he had a use for our country? Why do you treat us like building lots—to be haggled over a little and sold?"

"I don't," I said.

Hana patted my shoulder.

"No. You are my love. But your Lord Runciman, and your Chamberlain and Sir Simon, are not our friends. Thank heaven if we have the French with us."

"Trust nobody," I said anxiously.

She ignored this. Frowning, eyes wrinkled against the sun, she refused to let me drive the car. "No, no, you are tired; you've come a journey. And you work hard, too hard."

"And you, Hana? You don't overwork?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "It is the whole of my life," she said simply. A little colour came into her cheeks; she was afraid she had drawn attention to herself. She said hurriedly:

"You've seen the letter the Czech writers sent out? It is addressed 'To the Conscience of the World.' I think it is a modest peaceable letter."

"My poor Hana, where do you imagine the world keeps its conscience? Where it can be got at by a modest peaceable nation? You should have sent it, to save time, to the dead letter office."

"Don't try to dishearten me," she said, smiling.

It was still light when we reached Prague. Except that there were few Sokol uniforms and no banners it looked as it had in June. A fleet of immense white clouds swung at anchor over the streets; they took all the colour out of the sky. An exquisite happiness seized me; I had the impression that I was coming home: all the things I had forced myself, and with what anguish, to give up—the look of grey old houses, an undercurrent of coolness in the warmth of summer evenings, trees bronzed by the light—came to meet me in Prague. It was as though the past, closed against me by my own will, had crossed the North Sea by another route to catch me up here: I had never felt happier.

Hana dropped me at the hotel on the Václavské Náměstí. The manager, a little less dour than he had been in June, offered me the same room. It looked over the courtyard of a restaurant, backed by a modest eighteenth-century palace.

"You liked it because of the many lighted windows at night and the fountain. Now you will see few lights, but perhaps you will hear aeroplanes instead."

"You take it calmly."

He made a protective gesture with both hands, as though he were holding a bird. "Go out and look at the people in the streets. You will find them all calm." He waited. "If

our friends were as calm," he said delicately, "—or if we still had friends."

On Monday the ordinary people in Prague discovered that they were to be betrayed. Each of them must have felt, at the centre of his body, the sickness that starts in us when we hear that a friend has been speaking of us contemptuously. But the faces in the streets remained quiet; the only raised voices came from wireless sets tuned into German stations. These slavered obediently bitterness, hatred, lies. It is to the honour of the Nazis to have befouled almost as many of the great dead as they have exiled and robbed the living. Heine's poetry had been stolen from him already. Now Hus became a byword—"Hussite hordes" carried out the brutalities ordered, if you could take the word of these voices, by Beneš.

A Czech schoolboy, halted on his way to school by the German frothing out of a loud-speaker on a window-sill, listened for a minute and laughed cheerfully. He had not yet learned that there is truth and Hitler truth. Neither had his older companions. Under a sky radiant with light, they went soberly to their work. I tried to find one face on which fear or panic had set new lines since yesterday. If I could find one, one only, I could set it against the bad faith of French statesmen and the ignorance of the English. Alas, not a single face came forward to help me with the burden of shame, and fear for the future, that I had been carrying since the morning. By its gravity and decent colour each one sunk me deeper in disgust of myself.

When I went into Hana's room she was listening, near the window that opened into a narrow passage of the seven-

teenth century, to Stehlík speaking from Paris. A slight movement of her lips invited me to sit down. Afraid that she had not put me at my ease yet, she smiled, raising her hand.

I waited. The sun was directly overhead, pouring between her window and the wall opposite a bright steady warmth. A breeze shifted the papers lying on her desk; it swept one into the wastepaper basket. I fished it out.

"... To the Conscience of the World . . . we appeal to you to keep watch over the most cherished possession of Europe and the whole civilised world: love of truth, freedom . . ."

Hurriedly, I returned it to the wastepaper basket, to lie with yesterday's newspapers and torn envelopes.

Hana put the receiver down and smiled at me again.

"I'm ashamed—" I began.

She interrupted. "It's not you, my dear friend. You musn't be made responsible for things you don't do. Besides—all is not lost yet."

She drew a long breath, as though she were just coming to the surface from the depths into which she had let herself fall to reach Paris.

"What does he say?"

"At the conference yesterday in London the French Ministers heard with relief that, at Berchtesgaden, Mr. Chamberlain arranged with Hitler to dismember our country. All our defences, our important industries, are to be surrendered to him, and our foreign policy changed round. When it is done, what is left of our country will be guaranteed—I *can't* smile—by Hitler. And by England and France. By France—as if next time she should keep her promise—I must betray you today, but tomorrow, trust me,

I will be loyal.' . . . In London they didn't allow Masaryk to join the conference. They are blaming everything on us in Paris now. On us—on their allies."

Only Hana's fingers gave her away. They rested on the table, without moving, as though each had been separately wounded. A little life began to come back, beginning with the right hand. It seized a pencil and began, without her eyes noticing it, to draw the outline of Czechoslovakia on the blotting-pad.

"What will happen?"

"We shall refuse. We shall explain reasonably to your Government that no one has the right to order us to cut our throats." A charming smile fell across her face, like light picking out a splinter of nickel. "Don't be afraid, darling Mr Esk. We shall be very polite, and give reasons. We're not going to lose our heads."

"If they were all you are going to lose," I cried.

"We shall lose nothing except our lives," Hana said, smiling. She added in a less steady voice: "You'll see how fearless the Hungarians will be now."

"Thank heaven you're not always reasonable, Hana."

"But the Hungarians are so useless," she protested. "They boast, too."

For the first time she noticed what she was doing, and hastily added Poland to the map. "The Poles are almost our brothers. Slav, you know, doesn't betray Slav. If they help us a little we shall come through. At this very moment, perhaps, Beneš is talking to them."

At ten o'clock the same evening I was waiting for her in the gardens of the Černín palace. It was almost cold up here in the darkness where, though I couldn't see it, I

guessed at a fountain. All the autumn evenings of Prague were packed into this space, issuing under the seventeenth-century colonnade. If there had been voices they would have seemed strictly of the past. The poison of the future lay squeezed between two wave-lengths, both demanding the deletion of Czechoslovakia.

Hana came out of a door at the side. Worn, smiling, eager, she seemed immune from everything except happiness. Although early this morning she had said she would rather die than give in, I could not force myself to imagine her dead. She was too finely divided among the streets, the castles, the river of this baroque city—a finger or a hand there, an unwavering glance here—it was absurd to think she would be got rid of.

“What have you heard?”

For several minutes she did not answer. She rested her arm on mine and we left the palace and felt our way across the wide square. I wanted to help her into the car, but she slid past me and now sat leaning across the wheel.

“Without question we should have helped France,” she said.

I realised that she had just been told the rest of the story from Paris—so far as it had gone. Not content with ruining their ally, the French were scolding Beneš and threatening him with still heavier penalties for having believed their word.

“We tried to become more and more French. Their great writers were ours; we respected even their bad ones. What they have done wounds me, dear Mr Esk.” . . .

It was not so much for her own country that she seemed regretful, as for France. She patted my hand.

"Oh, you are very cold. We must go back at once. How abominably selfish I am."

We plunged down the hill towards Prague. I tried to comfort her but she shook her head.

"We shall refuse the plan. I have no illusions. We shall fight. We can't do any other thing. And we shall be beaten. It matters very little. . . . In the meantime I must save you from dying of exposure. I shall give you my air-raid flask of brandy. Thank heaven I have it."

I was asleep. The telephone beside my bed rang in the kitchen of my mother's house, the house where she died: I tried to find her, but the passage, the stairs, sprouted in all directions, and vanished.

I opened my eyes, in the darkness. It must be still the middle of the night or very early morning.

"It is I, Hana. Were you asleep?"

"What time is it?"

"Three o'clock. Come, please, at once. Something terrible is happening."

"Where are you?"

"In my room at the Ministry. I'll wait for you."

The windows of my room were wide open. I leaned a long way out, ransacking the sky for what we had expected, bombers, from Prussia. Nothing. It must be some creeping danger. I dressed hurriedly in the dark, to save drawing the curtains, and went down. The night porter had a cab waiting. It was the third he had summoned. Two of the foreign newspaper men had already left the hotel. Sturdy, looking like the peasant he still was, he left his duster and gas mask lying under the counter and fetched

cabs for us without seeming interested to know what new danger to his country had called us out of bed at that hour.

Hana stood up to shake hands with me. She must have spent the night in this room. A blanket was rolled up on the floor in one corner, beside a tray with a half-empty glass of water and an apple. As usual she was wearing a dress too simple for its real hideousness to be noticed—she had no taste in clothes—she had added to it an old woman's shawl that fell off her shoulders when she moved.

"Well? What has happened?"

Before she could reply the telephone rang. She listened, her whole body, leaning towards the instrument, was a slender loyal ear.

"... you will telephone shortly again? ... Yes, I'll wait here ... thanks ... yes ... goodbye."

She put the receiver down slowly, so slowly that I felt she was cutting an artery.

"That was Stehlík?"

She looked at me with an air of surprise.

"No, no. That was a friend speaking from Hradčany. At a quarter past two the French and English Ministers drove up there, ordered Beneš out of bed, and told him the answer we sent yesterday won't do; there must be complete submission. At once! Your kind old man will see Hitler again tomorrow, at Godesberg. He must have us cooked ready to be divided, to be eaten—at this supper. It's too much. I forget myself, I forget myself; I forget all your kindness—forgive me, forgive me."

"Try to forgive us."

She spoke calmly. "Beneš was so tired. My friend is almost crying: he says, 'I should like to die for him, and I can't even make these swine let him sleep.' ... A council

is going on in Hradčany now. You must stay with me, please. Stehlík will want a report."

Her voice is as quiet, with the same undertone of fanaticism, as in the Street of the Alchemists. It reminds me of endless warm afternoons when I was young.

Hana has switched off the light and pulled the curtains. The exquisite clarity of the air tumbling down this shaft. The birds must have been calling a long time; already they are abrupt and there are moments of complete silence, in which only the light chatters. It is cold. A minute ago Hana noticed I was shivering, and tried to put her shawl round me. My annoyance made her laugh. I was so thankful for this sign of returning energy that I told her that in England it is considered an insult when a young woman offers her shawl to a man.

"Really?" she smiled. "What extraordinary people you are. You have so many refined feelings, yet you sicken the rest of the world with your materialism and your brutal self-interest."

"All nations are alike in self-interest."

"We tried to be different," she said sadly. "We must be like the others now—perhaps."

"The Cabinet is still discussing. Impudent questions from London—'Haven't the Czechs decided? Tell them to be quick.' We are warned: if we don't submit, England and France will decline to help us. We shall be invaded across every frontier—Germany, Hungary, Poland. Hitler has been told to count on this. Who has told him? France will do nothing. We are alone. The English order us to 'take account of realities.' It seems our alliance with France was

not a reality. All these years we imagined it was—just as we imagined that the French meant what they said when, once a week at least, they promised to keep their promise.”

The receiver held fast in her fingers, Hana turned to me a face as grey as her blotting-pad, scribbled with marks of despair and disbelief. I thought she was going to faint, but when I touched her her body was tense. It sprang away from me.

“Something fresh has happened?” I asked hurriedly.

“No. We are given to understand—we should only be like Spain. There would be Non-intervention. You will quiet your scruples—how? By calling us Bolsheviks? By talking about saving peace? Or will you be very very judicial and say, ‘There is much to be said on both sides’? Bolsheviks!—our sober honest thrifty people! No, no, I won’t become excited again. See, I am still. I am very still.”

I turned away my eyes. What can I say?

Dazzling sunlight outside. A scent of leaves and damp earth. There will be autumn frosts. The people in the streets don’t know what has happened yet. There is still the illusion of hope, like a shadow crossing the neutral roofs.

“It is finished,” Hana said. “Unless—unless our people refuse.”

The news spread through Prague. I went out, hurrying through the streets. I tried to decide what language I had better speak if I were accosted. I decided on German. An enemy is less detestable than a mean friend. Fortunately, no one spoke to me.

Just as I reached my hotel the official broadcast of the

surrender began. The loud-speaker in a café drew a crowd. In the doorways, against walls, in the cafés, women and men allowed tears of anger and shame to run over their faces. I stood listening with the rest, keeping my head well down. My mother used to tell me: "It is written on your forehead." If it were written there that I am English?

"... there are times when more courage is needed to live than to commit suicide. . . . Dear brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, children! You shall today utter no reproaches against those who have forsaken us in our hour of greatest need. History will pass judgement." . . .

I couldn't squeeze across the Václavské Náměstí to the hotel. A boy began singing, in a clear strong voice. Voices ran together in the crowd, a ripple became a wave and crashed over their heads. ". . . Where is my home?" . . . The police stood rigidly at the salute: one of them wept. More and more people had edged themselves into the street: the whole of Prague had been drawn here by the strength of an overruling anger. A man began speaking from the door of a shop. Choking with rage, he still struggled to give his ideas a rational shape. A boy of eight or nine, close to the speaker, followed each sentence with his lips, frowning, anxious not to miss a word. Unless he understood he could not join in the shouting.

In the centre of the street a current set towards the statue of St Wenceslaus at the far end. Carried along by it, I heard other speakers. All, separated from one another by a dense mass, were saying the same thing. The same feeling sprang up again and again, jets in a sudden fountain, and the same words.

"Get rid of this Surrender Government! What it's done is illegal. Only Parliament can speak for the country."

I reached the other end of the great square. A speaker here was shouting that the army must take charge of the country.

"Give us Syrový!"

The crowd turned as one face and began marching, steadily and cheerfully. Republican flags had turned up the moment they were needed. They went through the narrow streets to the river, marching like recruits. I was not able to get out of the ranks. The man marching beside me suddenly bent down, to bring his mouth to my ear.

"You're English."

"Yes." I waited.

It was dark now. He peered into my face. "All the same, you don't look like a swine. Stay next me and keep your mouth shut."

His reassurance made me feel small. I should have preferred being spat on. Before we reached the Charles Bridge I managed to squeeze my way between two ranks of the marchers and catch hold of a street-lamp. A weak shadow detached itself from the shadows of the parapet. Hana Čarek said reproachfully:

"You ought to be in your hotel. You promised."

"I passed it twice, swimming for all I was worth."

She was carrying a small electric torch, of the sort you give to children to amuse them—the shops selling torches had been cleaned out when she got there. She raised it to look at me.

"But—my darling Mr Esk—you are crying."

"Nonsense."

"But don't be ashamed, we are all crying. It's only for tonight. Tomorrow morning the Government will resign—and the Government of National Defence, with Syrový,

begins—at last! Stehlík telephoned an hour ago—Hitler is making worse terms. But what does that matter? The army will resist, we shall fight for our future and—you will see, my dearest—England will be forced to help us.”

She was radiant with a suppressed joy.

“Hana. You’re believing something you know can’t happen.”

“No, no. I am sure.”

She made me drop a coin in the river. As greedily dark here as under the trees on the other bank, the water sucked at the sixteen arches of the bridge, each with its saint. The last of the procession was passing on to the bridge, under the archway of the tower—a column of workers from the factories. The general strike had begun.

“If you could see their banners, you’d read Hussite hymns on them. . . . ‘Warriors of God, arise.’ . . . And ‘Fear not your enemies, count not their numbers.’ . . . Stehlík wanted to come home. The Council has forbidden it. He’s unhappy.”

In the *Prager Tageblatt*—I had bought it to read in the aeroplane—I found Čapek’s prayer. . . .

“God, you made this beautiful country. You see our pain and disappointment. . . . We were not defeated, nor were we of those who showed too little courage. . . . Our people are alive still, and it is in their pain we feel how strongly and deeply they live. . . . We believe that in the past we have not stood, and will not stand, on the side of wrong. We need faith; we need a hidden strength.” . . .

I felt a terrible revulsion at the idea of taking into France this prayer in which courage and agony spoke more nakedly than it is the fashion to speak. When we landed I

begged the pilot to keep the paper in his pocket and take it back with him.

Leaving the house on Friday afternoon, I noticed a man hanging about there with his hands in his pockets, shirt open under a scarf. He stood idly, staring at the door. Pale, half-starved, obviously up to any shady piece of work, he had—in spite of his thirty and more years—an awkward air of innocence. When I came back an hour later, he was still loitering there.

Olga Stehlík was in my room. She turned as I came in, with a smile which only seemed spontaneous. She was wearing large gold earrings. From where she stood, legs planted apart, as though sewn on at the corners of a hard sawdust body, she could see herself in the mirror. Not a gesture got away from her until she had verified it.

"Are you busy?" Without giving me time to speak she went on: "My nerves are bad tonight. A nuisance. I have to go to Geneva—to fetch my clothes and some papers I left there. I shall be away a week."

"And then?"

"That depends. Is it going to be war?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't know more than you do."

At Godesberg Hitler had tried to exact stiffer terms, threatening to bomb Prague, and Chamberlain, apparently disillusioned, was on his way home. Everything—the messages from London, Léognan's despair this afternoon when I saw him running across the street to the Foreign Office—pointed to war. Yet I had a suspicion that something else, something meaner and less catastrophic, had been planned.

"You don't want to tell me anything," Olga said.

She stared at me, a long unswerving look. "I'm not going to run away. But why should I tell you? You take no interest in me. I'd hoped—stupid of me to tell you, but I always hoped we should be friends. I have so few friends. You see I'm being frank—you interested me."

I felt uneasy. Since I disliked her, without a proper excuse for it, I had no wish to hear any secrets. She was an involuntary liar, too. I had discovered that she was slandering Stehlík to his friends: she told them he lived on her.

"I must work this evening."

"How heartless you are." Tears came into her eyes. She dabbed her eyelids with her fingers. "Since I'm going away—"

"Forgive me . . . it's impossible to think calmly."

"Oh, how bored I am with the Czechs," she cried. "Selfish, uncouth—they make me furious. Really I should like to thrash them."

"Begin with me," Stehlík said.

He looked at her from the doorway. The anger that had seized him altered his face, making it younger and less tolerant. From this evening, the freedom he had given her, out of indifference, to mock at his country, was withdrawn.

"You'll miss your train," he said. If she had been anyone else, even another woman, he would have let his tongue rip. "You'd better go."

"Very well, Jan. Don't fuss."

Swinging her skirts, she walked to the door. She was not afraid of his anger—or too sure of herself to notice it. She gave me a look of grieved candour, her eyes wide open.

Stehlík came over to my desk.

"Who's that man?"

"What?"

"That fellow hanging about outside the house," he said impatiently. "A workman."

"I don't know."

Hana telephoned at eight o'clock.

"The Cabinet has decided. We mobilise at once. First aid stations are being opened all over the city. Can you hear our aeroplanes overhead? I am very happy. If the air-raids begin tonight—"

I interrupted. "Have you your gas mask?"

Stehlík came behind me and took over the receiver. "What did you say? You have it? Good. I shall ring you up at midnight. I have nothing to add now to this afternoon's report. Goodbye."

It was a minute before he ceased looking at Prague. His eyesight came back slowly to the surface. He was exhausted and shuddered. He had become pale.

I tuned the wireless in to Prague, and waited. Before eleven a clear strong unhurried voice came into the room. Mobilisation. ". . . keep calm, be brave and faithful. Long live free Czechoslovakia." . . . It might be the last voice heard from Prague. The telephone rang. It was Hana.

"It must be at once, before the telephones are cut off."

"Stehlík is out," I said hurriedly.

Surely I heard a sigh at the other end of Europe? She said calmly: "The first lorry-loads of reservists are on their way to the depots, and in four hours the first reinforcements will be at the frontier. The police have left. When I came back here five minutes ago my car was waved on to the bridge by a child who could just see under the edge of his steel helmet. A legionary in a Russian uniform is helping him. Is there anywhere else in the world where the Czar's uniforms are still being worn? The street-lamps have

gone out. Mobilisation is going on in the dark. . . . Is there anything you want to know? I have orders not to telephone again. You must get your instructions and news from London."

"Have you a message for Stehlík?"

A moment's silence. "I have given you the message. Goodbye. I am well and happy."

The white notices are up on all the walls and hoardings. At the Gare de l'Est this afternoon two-thirds of Paris were seeing off the other third. Not a few of the reservists were wearing blue cotton trousers. I looked about me for the anarchist of the rue St Jacques. He had thought better of it—or he was not in any of the classes called up. The silence astonished me. In 1914 they were singing and yelling here. This afternoon no one sang. I overheard: "This time we shall finish it. No more Germans in the world after this. Finish." There were tears, but the men, young and older, were calm. For hysteria and despair you would have had to call at the Chamber of Deputies, or at certain newspaper offices.

Mme Rucart was seeing her nephew off. I joined them to pay for the drinks. The young man was in earnest about killing Germans. You might think he had been brought up with one idea in his head. His aunt was cheerful.

"You won't even get the smell of a square-head," she said energetically. "The war's off—see? Once we stand up to them they'll sheer off. You'll see I'm right. As for our own sinners! This morning they fetched a load of sand and dumped it in the yard. 'You fetch me a gas mask,' I said. 'I'm not putting my head in that.' It'll keep the kid out of mischief for a week."

"Aren't you sending him to the country?"

"What for? Haven't I told you there won't be a war? It's been put off."

Crossing the street afterwards, I ran into Léognan. He tried to dodge but I held him, squirming, by his sleeve, and asked him what he and his friends were planning. He pretended not to know what I meant. Then, afraid that someone would see him with me, he said in an irritated voice:

"You're not going to push us into trouble! If Hitler doesn't climb down, we shall. Put that in your purse."

He wrenched himself loose, and fled.

I believe. I believe in the existence of Evil. Proof? I heard it speak tonight, Monday, September 26, 1938. The name of this Spirit is Goebbels, doctor (of what?); he spoke in the Sportpalast in Berlin; he was taking the chair for his master, Hitler, at a *mass demonstration*. One should use the correct terms. Our great-grandchildren, converted to solitude by world wars or a miracle, will need a footnote on our custom of crowding into foetid halls to listen to speeches.

I once saw—it was March 1932—a Six-Day-Race in the Sportpalast. The heat was frightful. There were thirteen competing teams of cyclists, pedalling like mechanical dolls. Stifled by the thick sausages they forced into their stomachs, the spectators made inhuman noises. An orchestra brayed without stopping.

In my room in the rue Pierre Charron, able to throw a stone into the Champs Élysées, surrounded on every side by minds purged alike of mysticism, childish fears, and impulses to wet the bed, I felt the Sportpalast swelling in me like one of those nightmares in which the skull is stretched

and stretched to bursting point. It was impossible and it existed. After the turn of Evil, it was Hitler's turn. I was surprised to tumble to it that hatred, obscenity, lies, are merely human. Even when he screams like a horse Hitler is human. One can say the same, when they are roaring, grunting and bellowing, for his followers. In time and with firmness and patience, missionaries from the other countries could doubtless civilise the Germans. But what can you do for Evil?—hatred devours itself but Evil is a spirit.

In the strong acid from the spot-lights Hitler dissolved the flesh from his own bones—an anatomy of hatred was left standing.

"... Herr Beneš lied... this man Beneš... Herr Beneš replied with murder, terror, jails... this madman Beneš... Herr Beneš squats in Prague... the evil deeds of Herr Beneš are at an end... Here is Herr Beneš and here am I... Beneš und ich... Beneš... Beneš... Beneš... let Beneš choose."... Alack, sir, he is mad. Do de, de, de. Sessa. Sieg heil! Sieg heil! Sieg heil! Sieg heil! Sieg heil!

"Shut it off," Stehlík ordered.

I obeyed. He was smiling. "Poor little pissabed," he said gently. "Let me think now. Think. So he's given us until Saturday, has he? And on Saturday we hand over to him our fortifications and the rest of it, like good boys, or—My dear chap, something's wrong. Why not before Saturday? Why is he letting us mobilise? What's the game? Tell me, tell me."

He flung up his arms. "No, it's not by God natural."

We dined at Weber's. At the head of the stairs a woman in a white brocade dress, recognising Stehlík, ostentatiously held her skirt away from him. The childish insult put him in a good temper, and he joked like a sergeant-major while

he was swallowing the first decent meal I had seen him eat since Mâcon. Although the tables are set widely apart, he must have been audible to most of his neighbours. A woman smiled. He lifted his glass to her. "You who are about to rat salute us," he said, grinning.

This morning at the Quai d'Orsay I attached myself to the journalists who were waiting to ask Bonnet about the severe statement from London. He looked them over. His eyes might have been watching from behind a stone in the wall.

"We have no confirmation," he said coldly.

Léognan was outside in the corridor. Cornered, he stood quivering, drenching us in a flow of spittle.

"Sent out by Halifax? Nonsense, nonsense, my dear boys. The statement is a forgery. A lie, a Communist trick—they want to drag France into war. Go away, go." He waved his arms, flexible, like the legs of the cuttle-fish, whose other habits he shared. "I authorise you to write that it is a forgery." His glance fell on me. "Get out."

I went back to the flat. Mme Rucart was sweeping the staircase after the disorderly flight of our landlord and his family from the first floor. When she saw me she began hammering on their door, and yelled:

"Embusqué, va! They've gone to Royan, the dirty cowards. The car was crammed to the roof with food. I hope it bursts their bellies."

The speaking-tube in her room whistled like an express. Throwing the broom down, she rushed to it. She was grinding her teeth. "If it's the old maggot on the second . . ." An appalling smile crossed her face. "Why, yes, M. le Général. Of course, of course—at once."

She flew at Philippe, rubbed a wet dish-cloth over his

face, shook him, for good measure, and carried him upstairs. To please her Stehlík had managed to get a gas mask for the child. None could be bought. The so-called civil defences of Paris had not been born yet—scarcely conceived. This mask, the smallest made, had cost him more than he would have had to pay for a decoration.

Philippe sat on a chair, his sticks of legs hanging from the cheap suit. He was taking it quietly. Stehlík joked with him.

“Lucky for you, corporal, your block’s three sizes too big for you.”

Philippe smiled politely. In the instant before his face was blotted out by the mask I saw the agony of fear in his eyes. He made no sign, except that his hands, dirty and very slight, gripped his bare knees. I went under the foul backwash of modern war, a stench of maimed and dying children. It is true that a cold bestial cruelty is part of Nazi rule. True that I, I, would rather be killed in a trench than live as a thoughtful man must in the Third Reich. True and very well. But today when we go out, we volunteers, we conscripts, to fight for the decencies we believe in, we drag with us the weak bodies of children whom no enemy airman will spare.

There is no road out of this pit. The hands of the old men have led us step by step into it.

Stehlík adjusted the mask, and showed Mme Rucart how to do it herself. He took it off. Philippe tried to stand up and fainted.

“That fellow’s come back,” Stehlík said. “He’s been standing outside the house since twelve o’clock.”

“I’ll telephone to the Sûreté.”

"No, no. He's done nothing yet. Leave him be."

Towards five o'clock we went out. The man was lounging against the wall. He stepped in front of Stehlík and simply stood, rubbing one ankle on the other leg: he smiled with great sweetness. He seemed tongue-tied.

"What d'you want?" Stehlík said roughly.

"To enlist—"

He put his hand in the pocket of his jacket. I sprang at him and twisted his arm back. Wincing with the pain, he gave me a reproachful look. A piece of creased dirty paper dropped from his fingers, and as soon as I let him go he snatched it up anxiously.

"My name is Fouquet." His voice had the resonance and assurance of a man who knows how to pronounce his words. He looked firmly at Stehlík. "Fouquet, Robert Louis, printer. I represent here five of my friends. Dufrenne, baker; Rémy, labourer; Desnos, machine-minder; Barraine, porter at the Halles; Ducoudray, printer. All, except myself, Fouquet, are employed. We have examined the present state of the Republic from all sides, and in our view it is in danger. Its enemies are the same as always—as in 1870 so in 1938. We consider that these enemies of France are striking at her through your country. We therefore offer you our services as private soldiers. None of us is older than thirty-five. Two only are married—but there is no risk of our families becoming a charge on you—friends have agreed to take that over. Further, we are able to pay our passage to Prague, and we only need a letter or some other document from you."

He was being eloquent without a gesture, like a child told not to fidget. Stehlík's far from gentle scrutiny didn't disconcert him in the least. He was the spit image of a

corporal in my company in 1918, untidy, lazy, losing his stripes every few weeks, sworn at by his officers, obeying his friend like a dog; at last killed in a careless and idiotic fashion.

"What are you? Communist?"

"Certainly not. I and my pals are Republicans."

Stehlík smiled. I saw him change his mind. Instead of clapping the fellow's shoulder he began to speak in a formal voice. He was enjoying himself.

"I thank you on behalf of my Government. I am not allowed to accept your offer, but I should have been willing to enlist you myself. Thanks."

He held his hand out.

When the man had gone Stehlík exclaimed: "My God, how fatuous—All the same, my boy, you have just seen a ghost."

"What sort?"

"The ghost of the French Revolution. Jean, porter at the Halles; Robert, printer; Pierre, labourer—what else do you want?"

Clabon is flying from London, on the afternoon plane. I arranged to dine with him at Marius'. It is near the Chamber; and when we left at nine-thirty I fell over Léognan—he was kneeling under one of the darkened street-lamps, trying to make out a poster which had been slapped on to the wall so hurriedly that it was dropping forward. It was Flandin's— inveighing against mobilisation. . . . "You Are Being Tricked." . . .

A policeman ran across the street and snatched it down under Léognan's nose. Furious, he was afraid to do more than raise both arms in despair.

"Ah, the police. Murderers. Apes."

Affable the moment he saw that Stehlík was not with me, he invited us to his flat. It was a few steps away, in the rue de l'Université. He lives there with an elderly sister who has kept house for him since his wife died. Mademoiselle Léognan has the muscles of a broken-down athlete. Pale short-sighted eyes, filled with suspicion, embedded on the outskirts of a wide nose. She greeted us with a mild friendliness, polite, insincere, charming. Since, as soon as she could stand she was taken out to help her mother in the fields, she has lived the greatest part of her life in the poorest and hardest way: her Etonian manner is purely defensive, acquired as any Under-Secretary might acquire it, through fear.

The three rooms of Léognan's flat were so crammed with furniture that our knees touched when we sat facing each other in the sitting-room.

"Would you believe it, my brother brought home a wireless set yesterday! He took it from our cousin in the Avenue d'Italie, who owes us—actually!—five hundred francs—"

"Hold your tongue, Eugénie."

Léognan fussed about in a corner. He was trying to pick up London. All at once a tragic and disagreeable voice crashed into the room. The English Prime Minister. I realised the man's utter sincerity. He made no effort to appear generous or well-informed. He gave away freely all his distaste for a small democratic nation, his prejudices, his instinctive sympathy with autocracies. He kept silent about the German maps he had seen at Godesberg, which showed Czechoslovakia dismembered. He kept back every emotion which might have irritated Hitler, magnanimity,

courage, vision. Nothing spoke through his voice, the voice of an old man, perhaps of a Wesleyan butcher in a provincial town, except his exhaustion, his distrust of generous emotions, his obstinacy.

Léognan was overjoyed.

"You see?" he cried, simpering, rubbing his hands. "He calls the Czechs 'people we know nothing about.' That, tee-hee puts them properly in their place! He promises to make the Czechs keep their word. Doesn't that show what he thinks about them. He thinks they're twisters and liars. Precisely what Hitler has always said! There isn't going to be war with Germany. How can there be now?"

"The Germans are a servile and backward race," Clabon said with cold energy.

Too happy to take offence, Léognan cried: "If I may say so, you make the common mistake of confusing Hitler with Germany. Hitler—" he tapped a finger on his nose—"Hitler is insane. When your Lord Wilson called on him he frothed at the mouth."

"Quite likely," Clabon said drily. "But we're mobilising our fleet."

"Wha-at?" Léognan's mouth fell apart like wet fruit.

"It had been decided before I left London. Ring up your department. By now they ought to have the news."

Léognan bolted into another corner. His telephone, never moved since it had been installed in 1890 by a former tenant, was fixed almost on the floor. It shot forward on a mechanical arm like a jack-in-the-box. Doubled over it, Léognan wagged his head feebly from side to side.

". . . no, no, it's not possible. It's treachery—frightful—abominable—treachery."

He pushed the telephone away and stood up. "The moral

decrepitude of England," he whispered. "It leaves me—speechless."

"Dear me," Clabon said.

"I tell you—it shan't succeed." His teeth chattered. "It's not irrevocable. I shan't allow France to declare war on Germany—do you hear? For the Czechs of all people! What crashing idiocy. We shall act instantly in Berlin—Rome—"

"You're so anxious to sell your friends that you can't wait to get an offer?"

An extraordinary look of cunning and obstinacy came on Léognan's face. Fear acted on him to make him twice as intelligent and much more unprincipled. It must have been the moment when he decided to issue to the Paris press his statement denying that Hitler had threatened general mobilisation for tomorrow.

Suddenly the contempt in Clabon's voice reached his vanity, the organ which took the place in him of a sex—it was quite as vulnerable. He became pale with anger.

"You—warmonger. You're trying to incite our people against the Germans. Blackguard! You're not a Frenchman."

Clabon got up.

"I can't quarrel with you," he said indifferently. "Where's my hat?"

Léognan's sister hurried to get our things, thrusting them at us with an austere air of dislike. As we left I saw her take Léognan's head between her hands and begin stroking it with anxious tenderness; her thick wrinkled lips let fall the meaningless noises made by an infant at its mother.

Shambling along the street, Clabon said: "What a brute! And one can't even kick him. He'd fall apart."

I took him to my room, to wait for Stehlík. He began to smoke, covering his clothes and the floor with ash. His new trick of talking to himself gave away his sense of uncertainty—he had been warned they were going to dismiss him.

“... the only genuine plans being made in London are against an outbreak of courage and decency. The future has been settled already behind our backs, and what is coming to life minute by minute is only the past. All our coldness towards a Republican Germany, and towards the League—” he could scarcely bring himself to use the name of his dead child—“and our complacency while they were being murdered, is alive and active. All else is dead.”

He spoke to me without any emotion. “You ought to see the trains leaving Paddington—crowded to the roof with people rich enough to pay through the nose for a funk-hole.”

Stehlík came in at two in the morning, bringing in with him the tension of darkened streets and the mist rising from the Seine. He had been at the Legation, waiting to seize a minute when every line was not in use to telephone to Hana. No other line to Prague was alive still. She was not in her room when he got through.

The pupils of his eyes had contracted to points of hatred and derision. He looked as he must have looked when a Bolshevik general who had promised him a safe passage for his battalion attacked suddenly at night.

The telephone rang as he came in. He listened without moving.

“That was London,” he said gently. “Chamberlain is trying to arrange a third visit to Hitler. Why?”

Clabon fumbled with one of his boot-laces.

"Don't you know we're selling you? They understood each other at Godesberg. The gas masks and death-bed speeches will make it easy for people to swallow unpalatable terms. Hitler is certain we're going to flutter into his arms. Haven't you noticed—there are no air-raid precautions in Berlin?"

Stehlík turned very red. "The English," he said, "are cowards."

There was a minute's silence. Clabon was taking back, and giving to England, all he had vowed of love and devotion to the League of Nations. Certainly England was not in less need of it. What pricked him was the thought that he would always give his life to things marked to die. His sadness turned to anger against Stehlík.

"You think so? May I know what you think of your own people? I understand that General Syrový is as prepared as anyone else to surrender his country."

The telephone, ringing again, cut off the tension between them. I felt that I had been reprieved at the last minute. London again. I made notes as I listened. Stehlík read them aloud over my shoulder.

". . . Chamberlain's offer to Hitler. Willing fly Berlin. Definite assurances to Hitler. Stop. Follows from Prague—English Minister orders Beneš to negotiate with Poland for surrender of Teschen. Warns him to accept terms before Germans invade the country. Beneš accepts." . . .

Stehlík laughed. "Well, that's that." Generous now there was nothing to be said for England, he said to Clabon:

"Undoubtedly your people did their best for us."

Clabon said nothing. He was suffering his first disappointment as a young lover. I told him I didn't believe for a

minute that our statesmen were playing sinister tricks on us.

"They're not cunning; they're parochial. Most of them are lovers of England, who would sacrifice any weaker country to her. Everything else in them may be mean and greedy, but not their feeling for England. It's not only to enjoy a year's profits but to have a year's peace in England that they're willing to hand over the men and women of another nation. Is it their fault they have no more vision than a French peasant, who sees that his dung-hill is higher than anyone's?"

Clabon got up awkwardly from his chair. "Time I went."

He was catching the early morning aeroplane to London. Stehlík saw him out, and came back to stamp from right to left in my room, as sour as a bear in the cells of the Jardin des Plantes. I fell asleep on the sofa, among files of telegrams and the evening editions. When I roused, Stehlík was still walking about the room. Six o'clock had just struck. I drew the curtains, letting in a day already marked with disgrace.

At ten o'clock Mme Rucart came up to tell me she had sent Philippe "chez ma cousine du côté de Rennes."

"Understand—I do it against my instinct. Yesterday evening my neighbour took on herself to tell me it was wicked to keep the boy here. I settled her to rights. But this morning I thought, 'What if the Boches drop their dirty bombs tonight?' I had a job getting him on the train, I can tell you. People were fighting like wolves for a seat. I spat on a man who was kicking his way in, and he didn't even wait to wipe it. Dirty beast!"

* * *

A message from Berlin. Alarmed by the movement of the English fleet, Hitler has cancelled the general mobilisation.

To Marius' for lunch. Léognan's triumphant face. Something more is up.

Clabon has telephoned from London.

"There's one comfort. The French got in first with their submission, their Minister saw Hitler this morning, and spilled everything. The meeting at Munich will be nothing more than a post-mortem. The disgusting scene in the House of Commons this afternoon makes it impossible to risk anything that might offend Hitler. The Opposition has collapsed with relief. All but a few of the members behaved like disordered women who mob film stars. I wouldn't have believed it, even of ——. It reminds one that Downing Street and the House are not England. Thank God!"

He had just rung off when Hana telephoned. Her first message since Friday, five days. Her voice sounded slack, as though it were dragged down by the weight of all the fears, hatreds, and uncertainties it had to pass through in crossing Europe.

"Hana. Are you all right?" I asked her.

"I am well. Please give a message to General Stehlík. When he flies to Munich tomorrow, to the conference, he . . ."

Our concierge greeted Stehlík when he came back on Friday with as much solemnity as a funeral. To wait for him she put on her black silk dress. She had learned from

Le Journal that the Czechs were in disgrace and she was anxious to reassure him.

"Well," he said to her, "it wasn't the Boches who climbed down. But there won't be war this autumn."

"Thanks, M. le Général. It will be worse when it comes."

"We were driven from the aerodrome in a police car; our companions obviously belonged to the Gestapo. Our two official delegates were kept outside the Conference room like clerks or beggars for nine hours. After six hours we were given the plan and a map. None of us had expected to be condemned to death. Our protests, rational—my God, how much too rational we have been—were flicked off. That bloodless English voice repeated, 'If you don't accept, you will have to settle your account with Germany alone.' We were allowed—between one and two in the morning—to dirty the Conference room by entering it. Your Prime Minister's mouth gaped in one endless yawn, either he'd forgotten what he was taught in the nursery or he didn't think us worth the trouble of lifting his hand. Daladier couldn't speak—he was sunk. It was Léger who told us the plan had been signed—signed—that we weren't asked to reply. . . . As long as I live I shall remember it was a Frenchman who spoke to us in this way." . . .

Stehlík stopped, and burst out laughing.

"On top of everything we're not being given time to pack up. The German occupation starts midnight tonight. Our allies didn't want to deprive their Nazi friends of any of their swag." . . .

I had not until now seen him when anger replaced the blood in his veins. He was calm, as bitter as sour bread.

The journalists kept away. He had insulted them already at the aerodrome. But we had a visitor in the afternoon. With that delicacy which endears Germans even to their enemies, Arnold came to ask Stehlík about certain documents bearing on the history of Prague.

"Why don't you go to Prague and look for them yourself?" Stehlík drawled.

"But you know where they are."

"If I did, I shouldn't trust you with them. Your countrymen have a bad reputation for theft."

Arnold smiled. His face, with its tight-stretched skin and the hollows under the cheekbones, was as typical of the new over-strained underfed Germany as that of any blond S. A. boy. He was flat-footed, too.

"I appreciate your disappointment, my friend. Why didn't you come to terms with us? You can see we're irresistible. Not for the last time! The democracies are crawling behind us like black-beetles. The Leader wanted your mountains, your Maginot line, coal, factories, railways, the ways opened to Roumania—oil, my dear boy, the power of our wings—he simply asks for them; they tumble into his hands. If he decides to take Prague next spring he'll simply take it, and I shall get my documents without having to look for them. Your people don't fight—"

The anger in Stehlík's veins moved slowly, unlightened by contempt. He had realised at last that Arnold is not a joke. Only a fool makes light of evil, even when it is bald, has ears like the handles of a jug, and smells of sour linen.

"As you know very well," he said soberly, "you were able to loot us without fighting because we were told that even England would be against us."

Arnold shrugged his shoulders.

"You won't tell me where to find the papers?"

"Certainly not."

In the doorway, ready to lean back if it were slammed in his face, Arnold began one of his expressionist speeches. Why has no one grasped that it is only an initial letter which distinguishes East Germans from the Russians? The same yeasty enthusiasms, the same tendency to hysteria, yearnings to be protected, uncontrolled cruelty and equally uncontrolled tenderness. Looked at calmly, Arnold is a medical curiosity.

"Germany is young, impatient. Germany must be served. And that, by God, is no mere phrase. The young gods of the North, with hair like comets—"

I shut the door.

Hana's voice. In the hour of humiliation and defeat, clear, almost ringing.

"Our hearts are aching and we have not reached yet the top of our Calvary. . . .

"The German Chargé d'Affaires ordered our Foreign Minister out of bed this morning to receive his orders. We had until noon to accept. . . .

"At noon. 'The Czechoslovak Government, after considering the decisions of the conference in Munich, taken without and against them, find no other way but to accept, and have nothing to add.' General Syrový is speaking. I shall telephone to you later."

I waited. The bell rang at eight o'clock. As I ran I shouted to Stehlík, who was in his own room.

"You wanted to speak to Hana? Here she is. . . . No, sorry, it's London."

It was Clabon.

"Is that you, Esk? I thought you'd like to know that when Chamberlain arrived in Downing Street he told the mob he had brought 'peace with honour.' You know what his voice is like." . . .

Listening, I saw Philippe grip his thin knees in the instant before he began to choke in the gas mask. No war, no victory is worth it. Offences against these little ones . . .

Stehlík had gone out.

Hana tried to repeat what Syrový had said. She must—for the first time since she grew up—have been crying. Her voice dragged its wing on the ground. "He said . . . he said . . . the worst hour of my life. It would be easier to be dying . . . four Great Powers forced us to choose between a hopeless defence—the sacrifice of a whole generation—and ruthless terms. We were abandoned . . . choose between the death of our nation and the life of the people." . . .

She waited for me to speak.

"Try to forgive us our trespasses."

"It wasn't you."

"What is it like in Prague?"

Hana did not answer. I heard what was not her voice, a sound, at first distant, springing at the other side of that darkened area over which the troops were moving already, the voice of a whole nation, of its fields, its cradles, the stones embedded in its streets. Hana must have opened the window in her room so that I could hear over the wire the song pouring from a hundred thousand Czech throats. . . . "Where is my home?"

"Can you hear it?"

"Yes."

I sat down, stunned, sick with shame. The telephone

went dead. Hana had cut me off: she was alone now, listening.

I joined Stehlík at Marius'. He told me he had seen Léognan, who was gloriously happy: indifferent to the defeat France had just suffered, he talked of settling accounts with the Left.

"France, he said, had not broken her treaty with us. Czechoslovakia was not invaded, and therefore her ally could not help her. Charming logic. He said, too, 'We French can come to some arrangement with Germany: if we show that we sympathise with her ideas she won't trouble us.' I should have kicked his bottom if I hadn't, just then, remembered my year at Autun; I was sent there as a boy to learn French; its schools date from the Roman Empire; in the soil under a Roman outwork I turned up fragments of metal from the city before the Romans; the earth there is as hard as the virtues of the people. You can't destroy that France. No one can. Not Léognan. Certainly not superstitious German savages. For the sake of the real France, France the immortal, the unconquerable, of the Midi, the Morvan, the Dordogne, the Touraine, I let him off. But the day when one of her allies treats France as she has just treated us—"

He hesitated.

"You won't fight even for Autun?"

He did not answer.

In the fashionable restaurants they were celebrating the agony of Prague as they celebrated the Armistice, a sip of wine for every hundredth man killed. For the Czech flags torn paper streamers; for the tears of shamed men the sweat of too much drink; for Hana's crushed voice, "Merci, Daladier! Vive Daladier!"

A young man and a girl were waiting outside the house when we returned. Clumsily dressed and muscular, he looked like a young peasant.

"Ligueil's my name. From Blaye-sur-Gironde. I am a student at the École. The young lady, Mademoiselle Challans, is my fiancée."

"Yes? What can I do for you?" Stehlík demanded.

"Well, sir, I wanted to tell you that neither of us approves of the way things have turned out. If there's anything we can do in our spare time—for instance, if you wanted reports written or copied—we should be happy—"

"There's nothing. But I'm obliged to you."

"Not in the least. It's nothing."

Confused by Stehlík's abrupt manner, the two of them withdrew in good order.

Stehlík shut himself in his room. He came out in a few minutes, carrying the decorations he had received from the French after the war.

"Find me something to hold these things."

The only reasonably sized box had held throat lozenges. Grains of sugar stuck to the sides. Stehlík tumbled the medals in and handed it to me to wrap up, with a courteous letter returning to the Government "honours which have ceased to mean anything in the sense a Czech soldier understands the word."

"I haven't told you how sorry—" I began.

Stehlík rejected my sympathy before I could give it. "Don't trouble," he said coldly. "Neither I nor any other Czech needs pity from a Frenchman or an Englishman. Any we have we'll reserve for you when you need it."

Saturday. When I came in after lunch, I found the corridors and the landing stacked to the ceiling with wardrobe trunks, rugs, hat-boxes; balanced on one of the trunks a still life by some *surréaliste* painter of a young woman with eyes in her behind. Olga Stehlík had returned.

I was packing into cases all Stehlík's documents and letters: they were to be sent to America for safe keeping. He thought the French police might take a hand in looting the Czech nation.

Olga came into the room. She had washed off her make-up; the coarse smoothness of her skin gave it the look of a glove fitted over the bone.

"How lovely to see you," she said mechanically. She went on at once: "I want to tell you—since you are going to Prague tomorrow with my husband—"

She broke off. Stehlík had followed her into the room and was smiling at her without kindness.

"What is it you want to tell him?"

"To remind you to come back to Paris as quickly as possible."

"But I don't know that I'm coming back at all."

I realised that their quarrel had already been going on for hours. Each now only wanted an independent witness to the justice and the rest of it of his case, like statesmen broadcasting the customary phrases on the eve of a war.

Olga turned her large eyes on me, and said with immense dignity:

"I have a right to a tolerable life. My work demands it. I can't write without security, peace, reasonable society. I'm willing to go to America—he has had an offer from an armaments firm in New York to act as adviser. In fact, I'm anxious to go. Nowadays Europe doesn't give me the tran-

quillity I need for my work. If Jan stays in Prague I shall go to America at once. I shall emigrate."

"Will you be allowed to live in Prague?" I asked Stehlík.

"I have no idea."

He threw his arm up like a boy hurling a ball. "How in God's name can I tell until I've seen for myself? As for you—" he turned to his wife—"and your work. You have never written a word that is worth as much as a stone from Hradčany. One six-hundred-year-old stone. I don't despise your writing—why should I?—I'm saying that the only words worth writing are those as hard and exact as stones. You only write because you want to show yourself off. I call that an immoral writer. Your books bore me, too."

Raising her hand to her eyes to hide from me that she was not crying, Olga hurried from the room. She had not noticed yet that Stehlík was no longer willing to use energy in any of the ways that make life easier for other people—people to whom, for personal reasons, we owe nothing else. So long as he believed he was helping his country by politeness to bankers, editors, politicians, all those with influence they use first for themselves, he was at the same time willing to protect a wife he had good reason to distrust. Now, he was withdrawing from her, too, a kindness, a support, she had not troubled to pay for.

As soon as she left the room he took out of his pocket a letter posted in Paris by the pilot of a Czech aeroplane. Hana wrote that thousands of Jews and Social Democrats were trapped in the districts handed over to Germany. They had not even been given time to run away. Nor was any hand held out to them. The callousness of the French statesmen, the yawns of the English, hurried them to the

doors of cells in which they would be thrashed, or pushed into their hands something they could use to kill themselves and their children. She asked me, me, to find writers to explain to the English nation that something must be done for these victims. Poor Hana, she still imagined that England, more than other countries, has writers burning to expose lies, injustice, cruelty. With hers, she enclosed a new letter "To the Whole Civilised World," from the writers, musicians and artists of Czechoslovakia. I could have as many copies of it as I needed, she said; a thousand, five thousand.

How long would it be before she realised that no one wants to hear from a murdered man?

"We are not the last nation which will be crucified in Europe. If it could turn out like that, I might even find it in my heart to rejoice that my honest simple countrymen, too honest to foresee that they could be betrayed, were made to die for the rest. But we shall not be the last. You have sacrificed us uselessly, to snatch for yourselves a year, two years, of 'peace.' . . .

"We are suffering beyond measure. Many things will soon be altered, life will be harder—but we must be strong, our minds and hearts must be busy. I feel so much hope that I can give you part of it." . . .

The letter was addressed to me. Seeing her writing on the envelope, Stehlík had opened it at once. I gave it back to him. Where Hana was concerned every other man or woman was a glass in which she saw Stehlík. It was because I gave back the sharpest possible reflection of him that she liked me.

"We're leaving tonight," Stehlík said, "not tomorrow."

We got out of the train three stations beyond the new frontier. A staff officer in the retreating army made room for us in a car he was taking back to Prague. Long columns of tanks, guns, men, filled the roads. A bitterness as hard as the flints choked them, with the dust from the fields. Neither for the staff car nor for one of those refugee carts in which nothing except the poverty and despair of the owner are being carried on to the next halt were they willing to shift. We were forced into the ditch. At last we were able to turn on to a side road.

When he knew I was English the officer said: "I am sorry, I can't talk to you."

A minute later he burst out:

"If anyone tells you we should have been defeated in three weeks, it's a lie. Not in three months! The second finest line of forts in Europe. We could have held out for a year. Why didn't we fight? To hell with our allies. To hell with Beneš and the rest. We should have fought." He looked at me with hatred. "Listen, you. Without orders, my men have been carrying four, even five, machine-guns, rather than leave them to the Germans. What use is it? In six months, in a month, Hitler will walk in and take them from us. On that day—"

He stopped. Stehlík had gripped his arm.

"Shut up, you."

We drove the rest of the way in silence. We passed cart-loads of refugees without even a mattress or a kitchen clock to attach them to life.

Stehlík was thinking about his future and the future of the country. He could easily come to terms with the new

rulers of Czechoslovakia, the bankers, politicians, and landowners, who had made an early peace with Hitler. There were, he told me, certain Czech bankers whose friends were Goering and the Bank of England. They called themselves realists, and their policy, intended to save their positions and profits, realism, or 'the country's best interests.' If Stehlík were willing to become a realist they would open to him their arms and pockets. His fame, especially among young men and soldiers, was worth a wage.

As soon as we reached the hotel in Prague he telephoned to Hana. There was no answer; no one in her department knew where she was. He tried to find her at her flat, and her landlady told him she had gone two days ago. She had not left an address.

He had to report to the President. I waited for him in the Street of the Alchemists again. The doors of the mediaeval houses were shut. Madame Thebes, famous fortune-teller, had decided not to foretell any more of the future; nevertheless she kept an eye on me from the back of her room. I could see this eye, hanging apparently from a piece of lace. I found it disconcerting.

I waited an hour. It was cold. Prague among her bridges and baroque churches waited like an old woman in a shawl for what might come.

When Stehlík came he was walking like a half-blind man. My anxiety stiffened him: the typical Czech look, mocking, half-impudent, simple, came over his face.

"Beneš is going to resign. Next week. How pleased your Cabinet will be. No more honesty in the wrong place, no more boring appeals to conscience and the League, no more idealism, misplaced—you should issue a White Paper on the correct place for ideals—no more sons of peasants and

blacksmiths annoying you with their sermons about democracy. Only one drawback—you will have no one left to betray.”

“What are you going to do?”

He did not answer.

At the hotel he telephoned to Hana's room in the—— Ministry again. Again no answer. This time he had the impression that her clerk was lying when he said he knew nothing.

I suggested ringing up a friend at police headquarters. This man said at once that she had been dismissed. She had protested to the authorities because Jewish and German refugees, forced into the trains by Czech soldiers, were being taken into the occupied areas—where they were jailed or sent off to Dachau.

“A stupid thing to do. We can't hide these people. What else can we do except try to satisfy the Germans?”

At this moment Stehlík remembered her cousin, an officer who had been with him in Siberia. He hurried off to see the man. He was away an hour.

Before he opened his mouth I knew he had given up thinking of becoming a realist. All those signs by which a realist is set apart from his fellows, smoothness, self-assurance, a hardening of certain muscles, the atrophy of certain motives, were farther from him than they had been. He had quarrelled with Hana's cousin. Exasperated and bitter, Divisní Generál Čarek had been in a hurry to place himself at the disposal of the German staff. He wanted to make sure of his chances of fighting against the French in the next war. It had been he, more than anyone, who had helped to establish French schools in the Republic; stupid at languages, he had taught himself to speak and read French. He wanted to forget all this. He went so far now as to find

himself every time a word of the French language came into his head. A portrait of Masaryk, slashed across and across, was hanging above his desk like the body of a criminal.

Stehlík listened, uneasily. Suddenly he realised that only evil would come of this. A revulsion of such violence makes criminals, all the more easily out of good solemn men. His own mind, not used to uncertainty, hardened. No more nonsense about realism. He told himself that he had always known that 'facing reality' is nothing but the phrase politicians and financial crooks use to cover up their meaner acts.

He told Hana's cousin bluntly that he was behaving like a fool.

"If I stay in Prague it will be to fight against you. Friendship with Hitler. What nonsense!"

"Be careful," the other said soberly. "You'll be dealt with, you yourself. I'll make that my business."

"And what can you do?"

"If necessary, shoot you."

In a good temper now that he knew where he stood, Stehlík had laughed rudely. I, on the contrary, was inclined to take the threat seriously. He shut me up.

"What does it matter? Listen to me. In a few weeks Hitler will be in Prague. I'm certain of it. If the Germans were conciliatory . . . but they're not; they only know how to obey and bully. That will be the right moment to oppose this delightful realism. All the anger and disappointment of the young who have been defrauded of their future, and the resentment of decent people, can be used. But only if I, Stehlík, am here to use it."

"You may be dead before then."

"Nonsense! Someone must stay here. . . . What Englishman was it said, 'The lamps are going out all over Europe'?"

They're sinking again now. We were your defence against Germany on this side. Now you've destroyed us you'll be faced—who knows how quickly?—with the choice between war and surrender. You may fight then. Who knows? There are decent Englishmen. There are even Englishmen who are as honest as Czechs. I am by God not particularly intolerant. You can see that! I believe in Europe. I believe that this insane continent can be cured. My country, my free lovely country, will rise again. Only tyrannies disappear for ever. As much of England as is free will live. I, Stehlík shall live long enough to tell a few young men and women the truth. And they'll see to it. Long live freedom! 'À nous, à nous, la liberté!'

Before quarrelling with Hana's cousin he had taken care to ask where she was. Čarek said he didn't know.

We were setting out to visit all the refugee centres in the hope of finding her working in one of them when the telephone rang. Stehlík answered it.

"Where are you? Where have you been? Another five minutes and I should have been broadcasting a description. . . . I don't know what you're like? Ho, ho. So you think I don't know? I can't remember the mole on your left side below the rib? Yes, yes, who else knows of it? Answer, answer me. . . . I sent you a telegram from Paris. . . . Then in God's name why didn't you . . . Well, why don't you come now, at once?"

He was shouting into the telephone at the top of his voice. I hurried to close both doors of the room. He was laughing.

"Oh, you are thin and ugly? Be thin. Be ugly. I want you to be thin and ugly. I shall make you fat and beautiful."

All the symptoms of a German occupation set in, arrests by the secret police, fear, suicides, sudden disappearances. Unwilling to admit that it was no use, I tried to find a friend living in Prague, a young Austrian woman. After eight days of a futile search I gave it up. My room at the hotel was searched by the police and my letters stolen. Stehlík asked me to leave. He had no further use for me, except to carry a letter to a Czech civil servant living in Bratislava.

I took the night train. When I stepped out into the mild early morning streets, Bratislava was giving itself the airs of a country town. For all that, and in spite of the Danube, the amiable stupid ruined castle kicking all four legs in the air, the genial wine-shops, it was unpleasant. The Jewish shops had been looted and were still burning; on the other side of the Danube, exactly opposite the promenade of the town, the Germans had planted a large electric swastika.

Stehlík's friend had bolted. His wife talked to me in a room with the blinds down; she was terrified by the bands of young men parading the streets with Fascist banners. She burned the letter. "All this comes of wanting freedom," she said angrily. "Why are men such fools? We want peace, not your idiotic freedom."

I left the next morning. At the frontier, Nazi guards were turning back everybody except their own countrymen. On a point of honour they pocketed the note-cases of Jewish and Polish travellers. We slunk back. I found a journalist who hoped to reach Trieste by car. We set out. At the Hungarian frontier we were stopped by a single Czech guard, a sergeant. He looked about seventeen years old.

"Can we cross into Hungary?"

He looked at us with a suddenly matured contempt.

"You're English, aren't you? Then you won't have heard—we Czechs haven't any frontiers now. Go where you like."

THE CHILDREN MUST FEAR

The flag over the station on the Hungarian side of the frontier flies at half-mast. Incautiously I gazed at it, and the elderly Hungarian sitting beside me lifted a gloved finger as though he were going to conduct.

"It is for the murder of Hungary. At Trianon. June fourth 1920."

"It is now July 1936."

"The flag will be so, like that, until we seize back what was robbed from us," he said, scratching his nose.

Examination of passports. The official is a young man in a soiled grey suit and yellow shirt: he is stunted, sickly, his face prematurely withered, altogether a shoddy object—a proper frontier rat. He looked for a minute at the first page of my passport, and pressed a yellow dirty finger on the word "author."

"Ah. Orter," he said, giving me a sweet intimate smile.

Budapest. In the Hotel Szent István I am given a room on the fourth floor; the wallpaper, which is elegant, suggests that whoever planned the inside of this hotel had fair

taste. From the outside it is as lumpishly ugly as the dolomitic hill at its back.

I pulled the window wide and stepped on to the narrow stone balcony. The river-front of Pest, and the Danube, barges and all, poured into the room. They met there the resistance of my whole life, I the obscure son of an English fishing village. The hunger that has driven me out of my home and its poor safety is stronger even than the Danube.

The resigned eagerness with which I cross the bridge into Pest, looking at all sides and at water the colour of aluminium. This city is shabby, dignified, and as dusty as an Eastern city—its stones are dry and would fall easily. But some leader of a horde would be certain to rebuild it. The form has never been left cold—Romans, Germans, Mongols, Turks, have all squatted in it. Sauntering along the embankment, I know that I have reached the end of the navel cord tying me to my past. Farther east than this I should be in new country.

I had eaten nothing since breakfast in Prague; thank God I am in a country where they make good coffee. Here is an unpretentious café—a few tables on the narrow pavement. To keep myself in countenance I pick up and read a German newspaper. Why turn one's back on the Danube to read this stale ink? I settle into strange cities like an ant running between two stones.

Farther along, the embankment changed its character. Big hotels stepped forward to the edge of the river; there was just room to squeeze past the tables of the cafés and the metallic trunks of trees. Every table was occupied, even if I had wanted to push myself in there among the foreign tourists and the Jews.

One step out of the streets of Jewish business houses and

shops in which tourists fumble their money and you are in a street like a drain. It gives off a heavy pungent smell—earth, sweat, oil. Perhaps it is the river, seeping under the foundations of the houses, that one smells.

When I got back to the hotel at eight o'clock the hall porter handed me a card. M. Nicholas Tihaneth. Correspondent of the London *Daily Post*: Hungarian Chamber of Commerce.

"The gentleman is over there, waiting for you."

A man of indeterminate age: he had black hair, black sparkling eyes, a round white creased face. His short body was muffled closely in an overcoat; and he wore grey kid gloves, and a single eyeglass on a black ribbon.

He stood up bowing and smiling. "I got your letter from Prague only this morning. It was delayed. There is no censorship here but my letters are sometimes delayed." The corners of his mouth frisked naughtily. "I am charmed to meet you."

"It is very kind of you to come, Mr. Tihaneth."

"No, it is a pleasure for me to meet a friend of the editor of the *Daily Post*. How long have you been in Budapest? Four hours only. Good, good. What have you been doing? Have you seen some people?"

He spoke rapidly, in a soft clear voice, but he waited for an answer to each question, keeping his eyes on my face. They were friendly and completely baffling.

"What are you going to do this evening?"

"Nothing."

"Then you will have dinner with me? I shall take you to my club; it's fortunate I have no engagement for this evening. You have just come in—do you want to change your

necktie? The English are always changing their neckties: they wear a different one every day. You look beautiful now, you shouldn't change anything, but I will wait as long as you wish. I'm not in a hurry. Notice that it is possible for a Jew not to be in a hurry."

It had not struck me that he was a Jew. His features were modelled bluntly in flesh the colour and texture of soft indiarubber. His mouth was close and fine. Now that I knew he was a Jew something womanish crystallised in his manner and voice. I noticed his hands, small, and soft, but not lacking in firmness.

We took a tram outside the hotel; it jerked across a bridge into the now lighted streets of Pest. Tihaneth pressed me with questions in a gently searching voice.

"What is your position on the *Daily Post*?"

This was embarrassing. Anxious not to disappoint him, I said: "I'm not on the staff; I am a writer. I have written articles for the paper."

"Oh, you have written articles. I am sorry—I have missed them. But you are a close friend of the editor? You know everybody? Why have you come to Budapest? Don't go back and say I am in despair, that everything here is finished. You can see I am not despairing. I am objective. Sixteen years ago, after the war, Count Bethlen—you have heard of him—said to me, 'I can ask your opinion because I am confident you will give it without fear or politics.' He said that. He asked me to do certain things for him—for Hungary."

He broke off to talk for some minutes to the conductor, with the same soft energy.

"I know everyone," he said, with naïve pleasure: "I know

the tram conductors, the dirty little newspaper boys, as well as Count Bethlen. They are all my friends. They talk to me."

A handsome little schoolboy, shabbily dressed, came into the tram carrying a satchel and a bunch of lavender. Tihaneth spoke to him amiably, and chose a stem of lavender from the bunch. "Please take this," he said gravely to me.

I looked at the child with smiling apology. He gave me a brilliant smile and several bits of his lavender, and murmured something to Tihaneth.

"He says he would like to give you all, but it is for his mother."

"Even the schoolboys in Hungary are charming," I said ridiculously.

"Well, he is a nicely brought-up little Jewish boy."

I sat holding the lavender. Now that I had so much, surely the thing to do was to give him one piece. He took it, looking for a second into my eyes, and kept it close to his hand during the whole evening, carefully taking it up every few minutes to smell.

"Here we arrive. We are almost at my club, but first we shall walk a few steps, I want to show you something. You don't mind?"

We stood in a wide square, scarcely lit, trees—a park—at the farther edge. An immense column sprang in the darkness. Closer, a heavy stone slab, a grave-stone, the Great War memorial. Memory dragged forward in the night the black stone in the guard-house on Unter den Linden, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Does every capital city in Europe go through this same Black Mass? If you must

memorialise your slaughtered young why not plant trees, give life back for life? Sap for dry bones, and roots where the worm can play.

"Andrássy Street, behind you, is the finest street in Europe. It will be to let when they have got rid of all the dirty Jews. Turn your back on it, please. Please look instead at the column. You can be impressed if you like. But don't try to see the top of it, you will crack your neck—look at the bottom at the statue of Árpád. He was the barbarian leader who founded Hungary. I must tell you only the strict truth—he wasn't a Jew. But he chose the Jewish religion. He had all the religions explained to him and decided on the Jewish. Do repeat this, please, to a Hungarian who is not a dirty old Jew. Very likely he will not be a Hungarian either. He'll be a Slav or a Swabian or a mongrel. I am pure Hungarian," he said softly. "My family has lived for hundreds of years in Buda."

He smiled delicately and triumphantly.

"Now, this way, please." He took my arm to lead me across the road.

We dined in the lighted garden of his club. He replied to the greetings of friends with the affable reserve of a cabinet minister. Without ceasing to pay attention to me, he noticed everyone who walked past. His single eyeglass pinned each for a second on the lamp-lit darkness. He smiled vaguely.

I asked him whether the Jews in Budapest feared another persecution. I had heard something. He shrugged his shoulders and said:

"After Béla Kun quite a number of lower-class Jews were killed, and an old friend of mine, a Christian and a Conservative Nationalist, of a very good family, made

speeches in which he declared that every Jew, poor or rich, must be stripped and driven over the frontier. I went to this man and I asked him, 'Why do you talk in this way? You know me. Do I deserve to be murdered?' He said, 'Well, you Jews are only fit for cities and you live at a swifter pace than we Hungarians want to. And don't ask me the silly question I see in your mind. You are going to ask me whether Hungary, torn to bloody pieces in the war, can afford to work slower than Jews. It's silly, because to live as you live is against our Hungarian mind—it offends us.' So—I understand that. I agree that the five percent of Jews in Hungary ought to give way to the ninety-five percent of Hungarians. But it ought to be arranged in a human way, not in the wicked way they do it in Germany and soon will here."

He turned to me with bright pensive eyes. "I try to be objective."

The other diners glanced inquisitively when they left the garden. Tihaneth had chosen a table near the steps. I was the only Gentile here. My position exhilarated me slightly.

"Why should Hungary sink to Jew-baiting?"

"Do you ask me why?" Tihaneth exclaimed. He smiled.

He held the lavender delicately under his nose. "Like every country on its way down we are governed by a sick man. Gömboes—I know his doctor—has a shrunken kidney. I hope he will recover. I hope Hungary will. I *think* we shall. But no one will lift a finger to save the Jews.

"Do you see that man with grey hair?" he said gaily. "He is one of the Jews I dislike. He is a dirty old Jew. During the war he made clothes, rotten clothes, and became rottenly rich. He decided to be baptised. When I met him

the next day I asked him, 'Why have you been baptised?' He replied to me, 'We Jews ought to be assimilated. We must assimilate ourselves.' So I answered him, 'If you mean by it turning an intolerable Jew into a bad Christian, then you are assimilated already.' Oh, some of these spoiled Jews don't like me. I laugh at them. A schoolfellow of mine, Andreas Seiff, was made a nobleman before the war. I don't imagine what it cost him. You know, here we put the Christian name after the surname, and Andreas sounds a little like Andrásy, and so foreigners take him for one of that family. He never corrects them! One day he came into the restaurant of the Szent Margitsziget; there was no room for him; he made a row about it and the head waiter suggested, 'Perhaps you can sit for a few minutes at a table where there is only one gentleman.' Very well: my assimilated friend looked round the room and saw a young man lunching alone; he went up to him, bowed like an officer, and said in German, 'Baron Andreas Seiff von Nimburg, etc., etc. May I give myself the honour, etc., of sitting here?' And all that. The young man looked at him politely and said, 'Esterházy. Please sit down.' You know what that means, to be an Esterházy? Perhaps the story isn't true. I hope it is. When I am feeling grieved about all these threats and assimilations and General Gömboes' kidney, I think of it and laugh."

His eyes sparkled with malice. Otherwise his expression was serene and kindly.

"How old do you think me?"

I struck ten years off my guess. "Forty-eight?"

"I'm fifty-nine," he said, politely displeased. "I am an old Conservative. But I can see the folly of forcing the Government to protect the Jewish clothing firms without making

them pay higher wages. We other Jews shall pay for it with our teeth." He looked into my face with a charming smile. "But then I am not consulted."

We left. He fetched me to the hotel in a tram and refused to come in with me. The Danube came tumbling out of the darkened plain to rush past us, under moored barges. We stood for some minutes on the embankment. It is ill-lit here, and Tihaneth looked yellow and very small. Keeping his eyes on my face, he asked:

"What are you going to do tomorrow?"

I told him I should make appointments to see a few people.

"You know some people in Budapest?"

"One or two."

"And they are journalists?"

"No—private persons."

He was dying to know who they were. I saw his intelligence working away like an animal behind his bright eyes. My reserve baffled him.

"You have some plans?" he said—sighing. "Why are you in Budapest? If you will stay several days I should like to ask my friend Count C— H— to dinner. He is of one of the oldest families. You would like him."

"That's very kind of you. But I shall be leaving the day after tomorrow."

I lied, to avoid telling him I had only a sentimental reason for coming to Budapest.

He swallowed his curiosity with a good grace. When I shook hands with him he held my hand between his and said, smiling:

"You will come here again and stay longer. Budapest is not a cocktail, you know. It is Europe's bread, the finest

bread in the world. Have you ever tasted better bread anywhere? Well, goodnight. Goodbye."

I went up to my room and switched the light on, and switched it off as soon as I had seen that the room was empty. It is only in Budapest that I am nervous. Too many wires, laid underground, cross here. I am afraid not of any person, but of some revelation. This darkness knows too much that I don't care to be told.

The shutter was still down over the window. I lifted it and went on to the balcony. The street-lamps on the Pest side of the river stretched to right and left like a grin, disturbing the features of the darkness. It was wrinkled with fainter lights everywhere. I should like to embrace this city, but it is too close and too alien, as though we are brothers who have been brought up separately. I needn't try to know it, and yet I know nothing.

I turned back into the room. The bed had been opened and my creased night clothes laid ready. The room, when I had turned on the little lamp, was too like a cell. Or I was still intimately aware of Europe beating in the darkness, the Danube a vein. I went out again, walking down the stairs to avoid facing the silent exhausted liftman. The front door had been bolted, but the night porter who had just let me in was not in the least surprised by having to let me out again.

I crossed the bridge and walked about the streets between the Erzébet Boulevard and the river. In the narrower streets there were no lights, and the fronts of the houses were dispersed and split open by the darkness. A doorway blinked like an eye which appears, for no reason whatever, except that the painter saw it there, in a corner of the canvas. The

sort of *reorganisation* of reality which takes effect in a street at night was in full swing. I understand at these moments how provisional and insecure is the shape, the timing, of reality that we have agreed upon. Even I myself have to reckon with another I. My flesh knotted under my clothes, I am resistant and irresponsible. What is happening to the men and women clinging to Europe as to a raft does not move me. There have been too many disasters: too many bad jokes.

The street I was in narrowed still closer. It was now a passage between houses, airless, with holes in the ground big enough to hide a child. I hesitated. There was a courtyard. I felt my way across it, dodging a tree as sudden as a tiger, and stumbled on the entrance to an inner yard. An oil lamp stood in one of the doors. I saw a child, its knees drawn up to its belly, sleeping on the ground near the light. It was naked except for a rag with sleeves. Its hand was awake, scratching without a pause. Its bones were slightly deformed through hunger. Crazy wooden balconies sprouted at all angles from the walls, like the fungi one can break off a tree. No one knows how many people sleeping behind them, in every room, poisoned the air of both courtyards.

Leaving the outer yard, I brushed past a man who was coming in from night work. He was stupid with sleep. Above flattened cheekbones his eyes were the inward-turned eyes of a peasant. I have seen a lizard look blindly from a hole in the rocks.

I am uncouth, defensive, full of hidden malice.

Nothing, nothing, nothing. The dumb weight of this city on my northern skull. I have been hundreds of years fetching to this place my awkward body, clouded bluish eyes,

and clumsy tongue, but to no purpose. I am still shut in my peasant's mind, avaricious, sly.

Five days after this I left Budapest, and did not, as I had meant, come back in the late autumn. It was not until June of next year.

I had heard from Tihaneth during this time. He sent me cuttings from the newspapers and long exquisitely formal letters. Out of laziness and a feeling of diffidence I did not telephone to him until I had been in Budapest three days. The mornings I spent warming myself like a cat in the gardens of the Royal Palace. These hang on the edge of the hill above the Danube looking over Pest. A monstrous stone eagle in the gate looks from behind for all the world like an old gentleman in trousers and a cape—Carlyle or Sir Edmund Gosse, or some other worthy gas-bag.

The squares up here on the hill are empty except for a few civil servants and tourists. The sun breeds the past out of the dust. A great way below the foundations are hot earthy radioactive springs, tasting of lithium and sulphur; nothing else is alive.

In the evenings I went about Pest, taking soundings of the currents of opinion in the city. To save money, I did not eat in the hotel. I drank coffee and ate bread every two hours. It is not a bad diet for stifling days. And when both bread and coffee are the best in Europe.

I have a theory—no worse than the other theories of an amateur—that to know what a people is coming to one shouldn't talk to journalists or politicians or other spreaders of secondhand ideas, but to concierges and women in that class, whose job brings them a word or two from scores of

people every day. I knew, years before it happened, that the German labour movement would flatten out like a straw in the final rush of the Nazis—on no evidence except the word used to describe her husband and two brothers by the woman in charge of a public lavatory in Berlin. They were all three Trades Union officials; and she knew what she was saying when she cried: "Men! I feed three men and I tell you they are all lick-pots. They wipe every day in the same place."

So now I ran about looking for a concierge I could get into talk with. Either I was in the wrong quarter, or this job is given in Budapest to a man—not a female concierge to be had. I had walked the soles off my feet when I saw a woman sitting behind the counter in a dirty stinking wine-shop. My tongue, being tired, spoke to her in French. I was struggling to correct it, but she burst into a torrent of French words—they were like stones scraping together in the dry bed of a stream. I never heard worse or more passionate French in my life. She had told me everything about herself in a breath. She was born in Paris in the rue Mouffetard and she came to Hungary before the war in the diplomatic bag, as a second nursery maid, and married and settled down. Her husband was killed in the war.

"Think of it," she said, rolling her eyes like marbles in a dirty basin, "he commits the infamy to die leaving me with five children, all Hungarians and all female. What could I do but resign myself to die here, too? When I think of the rue Mouffetard, of that torrent of good food and of everything one needs to live a civilised and friendly life—and look round me at this place—I want to open my teeth and lay all before me."

She staggered—she was enormous—across the shop and seized my hands. "I'm going to introduce you to my youngest girl. She's twenty-three."

We squeezed ourselves, still holding hands, through the doorway, and she dragged me crazily along the street to the entrance to a cellar. It was pitch dark down there. She bent over the flap of the cellar, and called, making the noises one makes to call hens. A girl dragging a sack came and stood at the bottom of the ladder and blinked up at us. She had bare feet. Her face had the childishness of extreme old age; it was withered. She moved like a sleep-walker. Her mother introduced us.

"This is my daughter, Mademoiselle Eulalie Nagy. Eulalie, this gentleman is a friend of mine—from Paris. Answer him in French."

Eulalie parted her lips in a vague smile and shook her head slowly. Her face hovered against the darkness for a minute, and vanished. She had drawn quickly back. I heard her feet scuffling a short distance. An absolute silence. She might have gone down into the dark earth.

"Ah, you see," her mother exclaimed. "She is a savage—a native. The others are all like her. Her employer is naturally a Jew. There are as many Jews in this city as rats. But now I will tell you something. In a few months, or in a year, or two years, every Jew in Budapest will be chucked in the river. It's the only thing to be done with them. With these hands—" she stretched an arm out like a bunch of old faggots, and pranced a little—"I shall tie them in bundles of six and roll them over the embankment—men and women together. You can believe me."

She laughed, shaking her breasts. Her face shone with a ferocious good-humour.

When I left she begged me to send her copies of *Gringoire* from Paris. Becoming intimate all at once, she pinched my leg. I think she had been misinformed about *Gringoire*; the single copy I remembered to post her from France must have been a severe disappointment.

Although it had been a scorching day Tihaneth wore his overcoat. We sat on the terrace of the *Wellen-bad*, and he turned an inquisitive eye on three almost naked young women at the next table. One of them noticed him and waved her hand. He bowed.

"She is the wife of my friend, Count C— H—. I think he is bathing now. As soon as I see him I shall bring him over to speak with you. He is of a very old family. And very well-known. But first tell me what time you arrived."

"When? Oh, a day or two ago."

"A day or *two*? But do you only keep count of weeks, never of days? You arrived on Tuesday?"

He was smiling, but his air reproached me. I now felt too much respect for his ways of collecting information to risk lying.

"No, on Sunday evening."

"Ah, you have been very busy. You were too busy to ring me up," he said with a sly glance. "Well, I shall try to comfort myself that you thought of me after only three days. It might—since you can't count—have been three weeks." He went on smiling gently. Soft and implacable, he forgave me for my lack of warmth only because I did not make excuses. Without words he could twist to make me look foolish he was at a loss.

The bath was so crowded that its artificial waves flew into rags. Dancing began on the other terrace, before the

tables and white wicker chairs. Pallid, in spite of the strong sunlight, waiters hurried between the naked-looking sun-bathers and the dancers, who were fully clad. The sun tumbled like a brass ball towards the hill at our backs, at the back of the hotel. In the quite still air there was a smell of coffee, oil, and freshly mown grass; strangely pure and free, the light quivered with the harsh reds of the geraniums crammed into stone urns.

Tihaneth kept his monocle trained on the bath, to cut off his friend's escape. I watched the dancers. Few of them were worth the trouble. A lank old fellow in white socks, grey high-heeled shoes, and a yellow jacket, capered pressing his partner's hand flat over his gall-bladder. Another, rearing himself on his flappers like a seal, sported a tight-waisted jacket of white serge and black braided trousers. The young men were less elegant. As for their women—they dress better, I thought, in Leeds.

I spoke to Tihaneth in English, and a charming little creature dancing past smiled at me across her partner's arm. She had a red and green Tyrolese hat clapped to the back of her head; its feather followed exactly the line of her thin throat: a voluminous silk petticoat sprang out below the tight jacket. She had bare short brown legs, childishly sturdy; I had time to notice the bones of her ankles, like small peeled nuts, above leather walking shoes and green socks, but no time to smile at her. My eyes are too quick for me.

Tihaneth stood up. "Excuse me. I shall bring my friends to speak with you."

Count C— H— smiled vaguely and amiably. He sat between his wife and Tihaneth and gave both of them the

same friendly attention, while he pinched his body all over to restore the circulation.

"You are cold?" Tihaneth said anxiously. "The water is too cold for you? Why do you bathe? Your wife does not bathe."

"The water is abominably warm, but my blood is deathly slow," the Count smiled. "Infants in my family are born a hundred years old—at least. By the time we are thirty—I am thirty-six—we are really walking about in our coffins. Wasn't there a famous English poet who slept in his? It is not necessary with us."

"The C— H— family," Tihaneth said to me, "is very, very old. It is one of the oldest Hungarian families. You have only to visit the crypt of their palace at Esztergom to look at nine centuries of our national history in effigy. The Count will give you his permission."

"Certainly. Do you want to go there?"

"I should be delighted," I said. I had no intention of going. The Count knew this without looking at me.

His wife pretended to shudder. "The very idea of spending eternity with all your ancestors appals me. There is nothing the matter with my circulation."

Her body, round and very firm, with curving thighs joined by polished knee-balls to her shins, was a deep smooth brown. A strip of blue cotton material across her breasts and another strip made into drawers as narrow as possible drew attention to it.

"You must arrange to die abroad," the Count said, smiling. "I'll bury you in London." He turned to me. "My wife adores England."

"We go there as often as we can afford it." Behind black

lashes her eyes were bright with greed and boredom. They were the eyes of a clever little slut. Finger and toe nails were painted a dark bronzed red, and cut into points.

I asked her husband about the financial condition of the country. He shrugged his shoulders. "Why doesn't England help us? You can't really want us to embrace the barbarians in Germany, but what can mutilated Hungary do? We are bleeding to death. Whatever happens, there is absolutely no hope for people like me. After the war my father lost two-thirds of his estates to the Roumanians. The rest is heavily mortgaged—"

"To the Jews," Tihaneth put in vivaciously.

"—and starved of the money it needs. Either our own Nazis—or the Germans—will try to take it over. They'll call it land reform."

"Why don't you do something with it yourself—and forestall them?"

He waved his long delicate fingers. "One can't forestall history," he said, with an ironical grin. "Feudal Hungary is finished. We who detest the Germans, and only wanted to be left with our serfs and our Jews—who lent us money and kept trade and culture alive for us while we ruled Hungary against all interlopers—we're done for. *You* will survive us," he said to Tihaneth in an affectionate voice. "You yourself may be murdered if people become annoyed with you, or thrown into the Danube, but your race will persist. Ours won't."

"Hungary will persist," Tihaneth said gently.

"You have another Prime Minister now," I said. "I hope there's nothing wrong with his kidneys?"

"Darányi? Have you seen him? He is a thyroid-deficient. Look at him. You will see." His face lit up with pleasure in

this misfortune. "No, no, he will not save Hungary. Something very unpleasant will happen soon. It will be called a spiritual regeneration! Even old countries can catch measles."

"You are tired?" the Count said to his wife gently.

The young woman yawned, showing a row of very narrow white teeth, like a cat's. "Yes, I must go," she said. "Give me a cigarette first."

I pushed my battered silver case across the table.

"Oh—Craven A," she cried, greedily. "They're too expensive to buy here. I make all my English friends bring me some when they come."

"A friend of mine may be coming in August," I said. "If you'll give me your address I'll send some by him."

I made the offer to show Tihaneth I admired his friends. He smiled. The young woman began writing her name in my note-book. "Margit C— H—." Tihaneth watched her with a quietly complacent look.

In a soft voice he said: "She will not say it herself because she is too polite, but I can say it for her. Her correct name is the Countess C— H—."

The young woman smiled slightly. She stood up and fingered the edge of her drawers, where a thin paring of white showed, exactly below the cheek. Muffled in his overcoat, Tihaneth bowed with the deepest respect.

As soon as we were alone he said:

"Do you like the Countess?"

"She is charming."

"I don't like her nails. And I am sorry that I must say they are the only genuine thing about her. I don't care to say what would hurt the Count, who is my friend. But I don't know anything which is good about her. Her father

was nothing at all—an officer without money—he married a German woman; she also was nobody. Their daughter was living—when my friend married her—nobody knows how or on what. He—I love him—he is intelligent. It is a great pity.”

“Someone much more ruthless is needed to save your country,” I said.

I know these old Central European families. They slip into France with the remnants of a fortune and die comfortably in debt.

“God help a country when ruthless men begin saving it!” Tihaneth looked at me with a smiling mockery. “We shall be *very* lucky if we escape that sort of salvation.”

When I came back to Budapest in July 1938, I sent Tihaneth a note, from the Hotel Szent István, before I went up to my room. He hurried round at once. I was going out to dinner when he arrived, but Hungarians do not admire punctuality, unless they are Jews. I sat down to drink coffee with him.

He was shabbier. The same carefully brushed black overcoat was turning a dark seaweed green. His face, as colourless as ever, seemed to have been squeezed. He sat bunched up in his chair, looking soft and determined. He smiled with the same sweetness.

I had noticed that the words “Hungarian Chamber of Commerce” were crossed through on his card.

“When I am not in Budapest I think about the taste of your bread and coffee.”

“The bread is our heart,” Tihaneth said. His mouth, pale and too mobile, curved. “You can see it is still sound.” He

looked at me with meditative curiosity. "Do you know the date?"

"The fifteenth," I said, without hesitating.

"No, you are wrong," he said gaily. "Today is the fourteenth of July. You wrote on your letter, the fifteenth. I was surprised when I looked at it. I thought, am I wrong—or am I reading this letter the day before it is written?" He smiled slyly and quickly. "Perhaps you have no sense of time. Are you sure you know which day you came? In the letter you said you have just arrived. But perhaps you don't remember, and you have really been there three days."

"No. I came at four o'clock." I smiled at him.

"You are going out to dinner? With friends?"

"No," I said truthfully. "I brought a pound of English tea for a woman I don't know, from a friend. I rang her up, and she invited me to dine with her and her husband." I glanced at my watch. "I was invited for eight o'clock."

"It is twenty past." He stood up with energy. "You must go. I shall take you. What is the address, please?"

"Batthyána utca. It's on this side of the Danube. Don't trouble to come. I can take a cab."

"It is not necessary. There is a tram along the embankment. You will be there quickly. It gives me happiness to come with you."

We crossed the road to the trams. Tihaneth looked at me with a smile.

"I have arranged everything for you, you see. This is the right tram. Not even a moment to wait. Please sit here. And now tell me. You do not know these friends? Perhaps I know them?"

He paused for me to tell him the name. I was silent.

"They are Hungarians?"

"I suppose they are—I don't know." I looked at him with an innocent smile. "How are things here?"

He answered in a still gentler voice. "I shall tell you. The country is being driven to an abyss—" he pronounced it *abbis*—"I don't even know whether it can escape. I will tell you a little story. When I was a boy an old journalist—he was a Jew, of course—told me, 'If our mother has bad servants she is still our mother. It is wrong to write about the wickedness Hungary does against her Jews.' I want only that the other nations should leave us alone and not write about us. Then, when this new trouble is over, Magyars and Jews can be good friends again—as they have always been, after other troubles." He paused. "How could the *Daily Post* understand what is necessary for us, for Hungary?" he said softly. "They do not understand—that I must send *only* news which helps Hungary. They have been complaining of me, in London?"

My mind is slow and simple beside his. I didn't until a long time afterwards realise that he hoped I could put him right with his paper. I didn't realise his position, either. Under a new law Jews were being thrown out of work in Budapest. His job as correspondent to an English newspaper was safe—as long as he was able to send news.

"Why should they complain of you?"

"If all Englishmen were as friendly and generous as you—" he said in an expressionless voice.

I avoided a feeling of embarrassment. "Things are difficult?"

"Something happened a short time ago which I shall explain. There was an article on Hungary in the *Daily Post*. A man came here and I didn't speak to him. I avoided him

on purpose. He talked to a great many people, and he got a fair idea of what is going on. His article didn't tell lies. But he told things I would never have told. Certain people here were angry; they thought I had given him his facts. A question was asked in Parliament; there were even letters about it in the press. No one gave my name. They didn't write, 'Tihaneth the dirty Jew is sending out anti-Hungarian propaganda.' But wait a minute, please."

He squeezed a flat shabby note-book from his pocket: the piece of newspaper he took out was frayed into rags. He fixed his monocle—and became elegant at once.

"Listen. It's written in a bad style—rotten—I shan't read much of it. 'How long are we going to allow a dirty animal from the Ghetto jungle to send lies about Hungary to an English newspaper? Somebody should slit the pig's throat. He would squeal on another note.' I went to a friend of mine in the Government and told him, 'I had nothing to do with the article in the *Daily Post*. I would not write such things about Hungary.' He was quite polite, but he could do nothing. Nothing."

He folded the cutting again. His black eyes sparkled softly.

"I told you I must be objective. It is my religion. Religion of a dirty little animal."

In the poorly lit tram his face looked yellow. He was smiling with downcast eyes, like a young girl.

"You will laugh at me if I tell you what is in my mind," he said placidly. "All these troubles in the world now are caused by sun spots. You smile! It is certainly true. Thunder disturbs horses and we are a very little more intelligent than horses. The sun erupts and destroys seeds in the earth, the brain, the womb. It is written in the Talmud—*When*

spots appear on the sun the Jews should be afraid. You know in the Talmud one sentence often needs pages of commentary. The commentary on this sentence asks: Why are the Jews to be afraid? And the answer: Because when the rod is brought out it is those children who have been beaten before who must fear." He looked steadily into my face. "It is true," he said softly, almost merrily.

We left the tram. I followed him, stumbling, through dark streets. The few street-lamps showed a blank wall and the door of a hideous church. The air was thickened by the darkness entering it, as in an Eastern city at night. I had the feeling of treading on hard dry earth covered with a layer of dust.

"This is Batthyána street. Do you know the number?"

I peered at the nearest door. "This is the house."

"You see you were safe to trust me," he said triumphantly.

"It was good of you to bring me."

"It is my greatest happiness," he said, smiling. "I shall also telephone to you in the morning. There is much since last year to tell you."

"What is the matter with your new Prime Minister?" I joked.

"Dr Imredy has an ulcerated stomach," he answered gravely. "I am told this on the safest authority. I am sorry."

Mme Czarássy-Petöfi was waiting for me in the courtyard of the house. She was young and charming. We seated ourselves at a wooden table on which were glasses and an oil lamp. The ring of light from the lamp spread feebly towards chairs, a wall covered with some creeping plant, a

wooden chest painted in green and black circles that made one dizzy.

I looked at her. She was wearing an English-tailored skirt and jacket.

"The last time we met you had a red quill in your hat and no stockings."

"What?"

"And you were dancing."

She laughed like a boy. "I don't remember. Oh, yes. It must have been at the Szent István. We never go there now. There are Jews."

She had a clear quick voice, and delicate wrists. They flickered like leaves when she moved her hands.

"What a pity you came after dark. This house would amuse you if you could see it—it is old and small. My parents bought it in 1918 when they came here from what is Slovakia now. My father said, 'We must only buy a small place: we shall be going back again in six months, and we shall need our money.' I was four years old. It would have been better to buy a palace. In six months we had lost our money and our estate. I am still living here—with my brother and my husband. We, too, always expected to go back. We didn't do anything to the house, and it was so uncomfortable at last I said, 'We must alter something; we can't squat here any longer, like Czechs.' So now it is not bad."

An untidy young man carrying a suitcase came into the courtyard from the street. He was plain and clumsy, with a big head, and a voice like the crackling of thorns. He shouted, smiling into my face, and threw himself heavily into a chair. He sprawled on the table.

"By brother—Sándor Czarássy."

"Give me a drink, Mária. No—I see it, I can reach it." He laughed. "I'm very dirty. Shall I change? Where is Ferenc? Where is dinner? I'm famished—dying."

"What was the place like?" Mária asked. She turned to me. "My brother has been to see a new summer hotel—in the mountains. Since the Tatras were stolen from us we have to find other places for holidays."

"The place was lovely," Sándor shouted, "lovely, lovely—lovely. But the hotel was full of old post-office girls who went to bed at eight every night. Niklós and I bought four bottles of wine and sang songs. In the morning they said, 'You mustn't disturb the other guests again.' I said, 'Excuse me, what is this? A hospital?' You never saw such girls—breasts like a hen, and one of them tied black thread round a tooth and walked about asking her friends to pull it. Look here, I would have pulled it for her. When can we have dinner? I shan't change. I'm absolutely worn out."

"As soon as Ferenc comes," his sister said calmly.

"Here he is. Thank God, thank God. Why did we wait for him? What nonsense!"

Ferenc Petöfi was good-looking, tall, his face cut in two quarters by a slashing beak of a nose. He clapped his brother-in-law on the shoulder. Sándor leaped up, and they struggled together and broke a wine-glass. At half-past nine we went into the house and began dinner. It was an excellent dinner—served by an old woman with the neck and arms of a Prussian officer. When she was bringing in the first dish Sándor said: "Run, run, girl, run." She ran, splaying her knees under her cotton skirt. Her expression of crazy rancour was unmoved.

"Where have you come from?" Petöfi asked me.

"Prague."

Sándor sent me a hard glance. "How do you like the Czechs?"

"They're all right."

Mária's hands flew back. Both young men spoke at once, and Sándor's voice roared above the other.

"Ho, so you think so! Well, M.—I can't remember your name—I will tell you the truth. In September there will be no Czechs. Hitler will march in, the poor bloody Czechs will run away, and we shall march into Slovakia at the same time. It will be after the harvest. These damned swine of Czechs have lived too long already."

He held a chicken bone in his fingers and snapped it. "Like that. But, mister, look here, we'll crack their necks. Every Saturday I go into Slovakia to see my wife. They know me at the frontier, they know my wife is ill with her parents, and every Saturday for a year they make me strip to my skin and search me like a damned thief. They do it to everybody. Every Hungarian. It's nice to have your shoes ripped off their soles! Once they smashed my watch and handed me a paper to sign I did it myself; maybe I jumped on it for joy. I said, 'No, I don't sign.' I don't sign nothing written in Czech. No, no, no, no. Very well, they put me in a room with nothing, no chair, no fire, it is winter, black cold, and say, 'See how you like that.' So in the morning I sign—or I would be there tonight. Oh, they are all right? You think they are all right? Yes, you have an English passport. The swine smile at you."

He gave a shout of laughter, a real blast of sound. "If I had *just once* an English passport. What I could do with it!"

"Why need you make so much noise?" his sister said. She was smiling and dispassionate.

"But he speaks the truth," Ferenc said, looking at me. "Last summer two boys from Budapest went into Slovakia. They just went for the day, it was an excursion, they had cheap tickets. So they saw a fine cathedral, and one boy wanted to photograph it; he had a rotten little camera, so they saw a policeman and asked him. 'Can we take photographs of this?' He said, 'Sure—go on, take it.' He stood right beside them and watched them, the next second three other police rushed up—dragged them to the police station—began questioning them, one in one room and his friend in another, to say they were spies, threatening them, 'We know you are spies, and if you don't speak it will be too bad for you.' They kept them in prison five days—waking them up all night. Just boys. So at last they told one boy, 'It's no use—your friend has confessed; you are both spies.' So he is almost mad now; he is crying and thinking, *Am I a spy?* But he said again, 'No, no, how can he say this? It's not true!' So after five days they bring them a long document, written in Czech, and they had to sign it. Of course they didn't understand one single word of it. Who knows Czech?"

"It *must* finish now," Sándor shouted. "There *must* be war. It must come."

Mária gave me an ironical glance.

"We must get back our country," she said in a light voice. "Why does that shock you?"

"Is he shocked?" Sándor laughed. "I shall shock him. Again. There is a Hungarian officer going into Czechoslovakia—well, it is nearly two years—he is a spy and they play a trick on him with an old lady—she asked him, 'Please look after my luggage for a minute.' He is arrested, the luggage has some thing, well, I don't know what it is in it.

They beat him. They are injecting caffeine in him to bring him alive. Then they beat him again. Then caffeine. Then more beating. He is unconscious. They throw cold water over him. They take a piece of wood, d'you know, and scrape the flesh of his leg—to the shin bone. He is unconscious. Again injections. At last they empty him into a coffin full, yes, full of nails, and roll it and roll it until he is all, all, all, wounds, and throw him away; he is finished, dead, in a railway siding. Another Hungarian, a spy, gets to him—he is still breathing—and this fellow puts him in a train, a truck, you know, covered up with coal. He is safely over the frontier and is in the hospital for eighteen months. He is able to walk now. I know him."

He watched me, with a malicious pleasure in my silence. My face showed no disgust and no surprise. He was baffled.

"But, mister, look here," he said in a sharp voice. "We don't act no different ourselves, I tell you. Our soldiers captured a Czech captain two *weeks* ago. He was spying. My friend who was there told me, 'Although his feet were broken, twice, and his arms and legs all broken, we didn't get anything out of him.' Look here, that was a pity."

"Never mind," Petöfi said, grinning. "In September we march!"

He laughed, with a young crazy gaiety, and embraced Sándor. "To market with the Czech swine!"

"Hitler will eat them for breakfast," Sándor said in a quieter arrogant voice. "They're no damned good. We march with Hitler. Those rotten Poles march, too. In less than two weeks it is over. France? Bah! France daren't lift her finger. Do you know what the English will do, mister? Cluck in Parliament like bloody hens until it is all over."

He stretched his neck from side to side. "Cluck-cluck-cluck!"

"You've forgotten Russia," I said placidly.

"Russia has no officers! Stalin has shot them. All."

"He'll think you're both mad," Mária interrupted, with a sidelong glance at me. She came round the table and filled my glass. The decanter was heavy; she steadied herself by leaning on my shoulder. "Really it's all settled," she said in a low voice. "The only thing is, will Italy keep the Jugoslavs quiet? No one in this country trusts Italians."

"Why should we? They run, lie, and haggle!"

"But, mister, look here, we don't want to fight the Serbs."

"They're as tough as bears," Petöfi said, laughing.

Sándor stood up and hammered on the table. "No more Czechs!" he said at the top of his voice. I put my hands to my ears, and his sister remonstrated with him. He kissed her hand and sat down. His eyes were starting out of his face.

"Tell me one thing," Ferenc Petöfi said. "Why doesn't England make friends with the Germans? You won't be able to do anything against them. How the devil could you? They're all marvellous—like lions. Majestic fellows. That man Hitler is like God; he makes men. The German air force is absolutely magnificent. You can't beat them again—"

"Mister, look, we *almost* won that war," Sándor said blandly.

Ferenc laid his arm round my neck. I shook it off.

"I was going to tell you," he said reproachfully, "that when I went to see a new film there was your King—King

George VI—reviewing his troops. I was shocked. They held their bayonets up anyhow, as sloppy as girls. Then directly afterwards German troops—simply majestic—every bayonet in line.” His smile ran out at the edges. “I was in Vienna in March, I tell you, when the Germans marched in—with the goose-step—whack, whack, *bang*—”

He sprang to his feet and began goose-stepping round the room. The knives danced on the plates.

“I tell you tears ran over my face and I thought, Oh, my poor country, what could we do against these fellows!”

“It’s true,” Mária cried. “Our only chance is to march *with* Germany. If we don’t she’ll squeeze us to death. Your country won’t lift a finger to help us—the English are all right but England is detestable. Cold-blooded, grasping, hypocritical, clever. England has always cheated. Everyone knows it except the English themselves. And then you are surprised other nations can’t bear you. Cheats!”

“Before our marriage my wife studied history in Paris,” Petöfi said proudly. “She is a degree—I mean she has one. You can see for yourself—how well she knows the English!”

I lost my temper. “Your majestic allies will of course double-cross you,” I said. “What can you offer them? Nothing. An army without boots.”

The lights went out suddenly. A cold finger was drawn down my spine. I am shut in—in the dark—with these lunatics, I thought. I was terrified.

Sándor Czarássy had gone down on his hands and knees and was barking and choking with laughter behind my chair.

The old woman marched in with two lighted candles and

withdrew without speaking. "Get up," Mária said to her brother in a calm voice. He obeyed at once. I realised that he was sober.

In a jeering tone, he said:

"If our soldiers have bare feet it's the Jews who are to blame. How could it be us? We were not able to order boots. Before the war people of our class didn't go into trade or banking. Such a thing was unheard of. We left that to the Jews to do for us. But, mister, in a few months we shall turn every Jew out and run Hungary ourselves. Then you'll see."

I shall see Tihaneth crucified, I thought. A round white Easter egg, rolling across Europe, left on the roads traces of blood: Warsaw, Berlin, Vienna, Budapest. Rome, Prague, tomorrow. To be devoured with the mind's salt. Shall I say, 'Your chatter disgusts me'? No, I am not that man. I listen, I am consenting to the business of jackals. When it is finished, from a safe place I shall condemn what has been done. Do I hear a cock crow?

"What will become of the Jews?"

"With these hands—" Sándor laughed and stretched thick sinewy arms—"I am going to chuck in the Danube every Jew I meet. On the right day."

"What else can you do with Jews?" Petöfi said joyously. He bent his loose-jointed fingers as if they were still holding the catapult he used to let fly from the Margit Bridge on his way to school.

"But, mister, look here, you don't know these Jews. Nearly all the journalists in Budapest are Jews. One of them—he calls himself Nicholas Tihaneth—wrote an insulting scandalous article about Hungary in an English newspaper. He'll get what's coming to him!"

I yawned. "Someone showed me that article today. It was written by an Englishman."

"Nonsense," Sándor said curtly.

"I give you my word."

"You're mistaken. We have proof!"

I shrugged my shoulders.

I walked back to the hotel. On my right, the hill impudent with points of light: on the left, the sensuously male river. Darkness, lamps, stars, the immense chagrin of the sky, poured themselves into a single symbol of lunacy. I stumbled from fatigue. My mind refused to look into the gulfs, leading God knows where, on both sides of me. Of you! All the same I shall not sleep badly. An expert finger will press the earth down at the roots of my mind. I can have no idea how far these roots go into a rude soil. They have thrust up so many tougher plants; I, the latest, the last, strong enough to go on living, am thrust up in derision. The sun furiously derides me. I ought not to have left the north coast and the gulls floating without effort of wings, dazzling—for as long as they stay up there.

The indoor bath at the Szent István has one peculiarity. Otherwise it is like scores of others which will one day be dug up and compared to their disadvantage with Roman baths. Strong agile springs spout under the tepid water—stand over them and you are painlessly massaged.

There were never more than two bathers before breakfast—a fat elderly man floating with his belly arched out of the water, and a melancholy Jewess, supporting herself against the side of the bath and thrusting over a spring first one then the second misshapen yellow leg.

I swam the length of the bath and went back to my bedroom. I am ashamed, as always, before the good-humoured servility of the liftman. The telephone rang in my room. I hesitated.

I could see Tihaneth with a look of affable anxiety on his face, waiting to begin, the instant he heard my voice, a carefully prepared speech. My heart sank under its sense of guilt and spleen. I am very fond of him, and I wanted to shake him off for a day. He made me feel responsible for all the cruelty in the world.

I took up the receiver. "Yes?"

"Tihaneth Niklas. It is you? Good-morning. How are you? I hope you are not too busy to eat luncheon with me. I shall ask a friend—"

"I'm sorry—it's extremely kind of you—but I must go out today, into the country."

"Then dinner this evening, at my club—if you do not mind my club."

"Your club is delightful—but I shall be away all day."

"What a pity," Tihaneth said softly. "You are making an excursion?"

"No—I'm going to see friends."

There was a brief silence. I heard him draw a sharp breath. He mistrusted my friends. He knew—since I had never told him their names—that they disliked Jews.

"When are you leaving Budapest?" he said. "I'm afraid you will go soon. I am glad for you that you have friends, but I wish you had none."

I made my voice light and affectionate. "I shall be here until the day after tomorrow."

"Ah, then there is tomorrow. Will you have luncheon or

dinner with me? I should be happy of course if you would have both—but I mustn't ask too much."

I had invited Mária to lunch with me tomorrow. And in the evening her husband and brother were taking me to the Kakuk.

"I'm very sorry. I must see people all day. But I shall be free between five and eight. May I come and see you?"

The silence this time was prolonged. I began nervously peeling off my wet bathing-slip with one hand. I refused to imagine Tihaneth's feelings. If he was disappointed, so much the worse for him. He had no right to expect kindness.

His voice was soft and steady. "No, I shall not ask you to take any trouble. I will come to your hotel, at five o'clock tomorrow. Goodbye."

I felt as if I were getting up from hands and knees. Dressing hurriedly I went out and drank coffee, looking at the pale Danube over the edge of my cup. This morning the air of Budapest was hostile, as harsh as knives. I felt them touching the sinews at the back of my knees. I was anxious to leave.

I reached Batthyána Street at twelve o'clock. They were beginning to expect me. I was over an hour late. We squeezed into Sándor's drunken two-seater: Mária and I sat side by side on her husband's knees and she held an arm of each of us. Her thin skirt blew back; I saw that her knees bent outwards, as a woman's knees should.

We were going to her parents' estate on Lake Balaton.

"You'll see how these people live without money," Sándor said. "They live on their debts. I am their son. I am too poor to have debts." He wrenched the wheel to avoid a

child squatting in the dust. "Wait until we cut the Jew's claws and flay his backside."

"Do drive carefully," his sister said.

He and Ferenc began singing, softly, their different voices modulated to a light melancholy.

"This is *my* song; I love it," Sándor said smiling.

Mária looked into my face. "It says:

"In the forest a branch lies on the ground,
Boys broke it and left it to die,
A girl strolls past: seeing it there,
She remembers a summer night and is sad."

In the naked sunlight the country looked empty, fit, as the prophet said, to hatch cockatrice's eggs. We rushed along. Sándor talked of his parents with an amused contempt.

"My mother never buys a new dress. They keep twenty-five indoor servants. What do you think? That we are going to hand them back their other estate on a dish when we've grabbed it from the Czechs? Look here, we're not fools. My father is a damned fool. He thinks we Hungarists, we young men, will fight for him and for an army of generals with stomachs. Not a chance. Down with the aristocrats and their stomachs. Down with my father. To hell with him. He is an ape. I love him, but he is still an ape."

When we approached the Czarássy park a roomy carriage with two horses was waiting at the side of the road. A magnificent elderly woman sat in it, holding up a tiny sunshade on a long ebony stem. It was Mme de Czarássy.

She ordered Mária and me to get into the carriage. "Keep

a long way behind; you frighten the horses," she said to Sándor. Lowering the sunshade, she jabbed it mercilessly into the coachman's ribs, without a word. We started off. She turned to me and apologised for not being able to allow the man a clean pair of white kid gloves every day.

"We used to order from Prague fifty pairs at a time."

"How silly," Mária said, smiling.

"Not at all silly. Before the war people lived decently."

We drove through a large cherry orchard. Clusters of cherries hung down, burning a rich red in the green. The trees were loaded with them. A delicate scent hung in the air. Birds flew up in squads as we passed, their claws heraldic against the white-hot sky curving over the trees. The thick rank grass crackled with grasshoppers like machine-guns. We passed under an avenue of neglected trees; the sudden freshness struck me in the face, and Mária jumped up in the carriage and kissed her mother.

"Keep still," Mme de Czarássy said drily.

"How many tons of cherries are there?" Mária said.

"Good gracious, I have no idea. Hundreds."

"Why don't you sell them?"

Her mother smiled, as one smiles at a precocious school-girl. We had reached the house. It was smaller than I had expected. A dozen children and two women suckling their babies squatted outside a line of scarecrow outbuildings in the near distance—the servants' quarters. M. Béla de Czarássy came to meet us on the terrace of his house. He was a suave Abraham Lincoln, gaunt cheeks, sunken eye-pits, with a gleam of fun in them. He had white quills of hair, stiff and polished.

"My darling, your thinness isn't decent," he said, em-

bracing Mária. "Why don't you take more after your mother?"

"She has an English figure, poor girl," Mme de Czarássy said loftily.

The house inside smelled of carraway and attar of roses. There were huge mirrors, mildewed, the gilt of the frames crumbling away in a kind of leprosy; chairs of which the silk tapestry was worn to a web as fine as M. de Czarássy's hair; carpets depicting hunting scenes, from which the colour had fled, so that bears, huntsmen, and dogs had become winter ghosts of themselves. In the gallery a body-guard of portraits gave away the family secret, a complete lack of moral balance—all these old Czarássys had the lopsided heads of criminals. Their few virtues were forced upon them by the crazy innocence they kept to the hour of their death. Each one of them, even the cruellest, the most destructive, died like a child, without fear or effort.

The young men came in. Old Czarássy excused himself to me and took them off to his room. He wanted his son-in-law to tell him to make the best use of his debts. Petöfi's job, a minor one, in a Jewish banking-house, amazed and disgusted him; he was not above trying to profit from it. His youthful springiness of stride was in sharp contrast with his son's deliberate clumsiness. You saw that Sándor was jeering at his father in the very way he lurched, stumbling, behind him.

I was left with Mária and her mother. While Mária walked round the room, humming, and touching one after another the priceless fans of the Czarássy collection, Mme de Czarássy questioned me with an air of ruthless amusement. Her manners were very bad because she was not aware of the need to have any. I realised that she suspected

her daughter. Unless I was Mária's lover why had she brought me here? The showing casual friendliness to an obscure Englishman was unthinkable to her. Among modern habits, Jew-baiting was the only one she would appreciate. I felt a malicious pleasure in misleading her.

"So my daughter has known you a long time?"

"Since yesterday evening," I said, looking Mme de Czarássy in the face.

"Dear me! You are very self-assured."

"Not in the least," I said politely. "Only very fortunate, madam."

Mária glanced at me and laughed. The fan she was holding slipped between her fingers, onto the floor. One of its delicate ivory bones snapped.

"Clumsy child," her mother exclaimed. She took the fan and rapped Mária's fingers sharply, meaning to hurt. The young woman's eyebrows flew up and she laughed again, gently.

"You provoke me," Mme de Czarássy said.

"I am sorry," Mária said firmly.

"You're not sorry. You're beginning to have bad habits, my girl."

They were speaking English, from politeness, but now Mária dropped a few words in Hungarian, in a quiet voice, at which the old lady smiled, and sent me an ironical glance.

M. de Czarássy came into the room with his lithe step. His look made me think of a dangerous cunning animal. He smiled boyishly.

"Your husband is no use," he said gaily to Mária. "Why does he have anything to do with Jews if they don't teach him their rotten tricks?"

Ferenc Petöfi smiled. Seen with his wife's family he looked shrewder and slightly ill-bred. He would be as violent as Sándor, but from another motive, that of showing these aristocrats they were not able to manage without him. I realised suddenly that he was the spit image of the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop.

During luncheon, the footman stationed behind my chair was sent off and replaced by another. I gained nothing. Both of them breathed garlic over me so strongly that I was almost sick.

Coffee was served outside. The heat had become intense, as solid as a stream of brass. We sat under an awning stretched across the corner of the terrace and tried, by shifting our chairs every few minutes, to avoid rods of white-hot metal let down through the torn seams. Looking over my shoulder I saw the lake. The water struck glancing blows at us between the trees. Mme de Czarássy panted like a bellows. Her husband slept. A delicate smile twitched Mária's lips to the shape of the butterfly, quivering, clinging, its wings folded back, to the edge of the ebony and silver tray.

"We might bathe now," Sándor said loudly.

His father sat up. His eyelids came apart like a split husk.

"Very well, if you want to," he said maliciously. "But don't think I'll go into a lake where Jews bathe."

"They can't bathe within a dozen miles of here," Sándor protested.

Czarássy only shrugged. He went into the house and came back wearing faded crimson bathing drawers. His body was as lean as a hound's. Two of the servants were carrying out an old-fashioned bath with a high back—the shape of an armchair without legs. They filled it from a

well, with Christian water, and he sat in it while the rest of us bathed in Lake Balaton.

"What do you think of my father?"

"Charming," I said.

Sándor Czarássy grinned. "If I didn't know you were lying," he said, "I should call you a fool."

"He must admire your manners," Mária said.

"Someone should tell him the truth. He won't find it in the English newspapers, they are written—all of them—by Jews. Like that Tihaneth I am going to drown some day. Mister, look here, all these people like my father are finished. That's done, finished. When we begin running the country we're going to break up the big estates and give the peasants some of the land. Look at that man."

He let go of the wheel, and pointed. The car jerked across the road. The man, burnt black, and sullen, had to throw himself into the ditch to escape death. Sándor righted the car.

"I remember him—last year, at a hare shoot; he was one of the beaters. I asked him, 'How many souls in your village?' 'Four hundred and eighty.' 'How many acres?' 'Two hundred and forty.' That boy—he is eighteen though he looks fifty—is of a family of nine souls—and they live on an acre and a quarter. 'Good God, how do you live?' I ask. He has no answer. He is not living, he coughs."

The night began to come. We drove through a village with one house in which every shutter hung loose, broken, and someone inside carried a candle from room to room—looking there for what?

The country sank in the darkness, as though it were being engulfed. An odour of poverty, of sterile salt, rose

from it. What can you do with a country which is allowing hatred to grow along all its ways? Let it be swallowed up, I thought. Before all of us are seized, and snatched with it into the whirlpool. Into the bitter gulfs.

Ferenc sang:

“Slowly the day goes by.
The cherry-tree is waiting
The hour of full moon,
The hour of quiet clouds,
The words and sighs squeezed from your small
Swabian throat.”

“What a stupid song,” Mária said. Her hand had fallen against mine, and she let it lie there. My arm tingled as though it had been frost-bitten. The pains spread across my shoulders and struck down the centre of my body. I was handsomely surprised. It was years since I felt this boy’s emotion. “Agreeable bitch,” I thought, recalling Swift’s phrase about Stella—and the last words in his journal.

Two persons, an English journalist I knew by sight, and a woman, were lunching at the far end of the terrace. It was empty but for them. I felt anxious.

“We should have gone somewhere else,” I said. “Obviously only Englishmen who don’t know any better lunch here.”

“I like it,” Mária said.

Four hundred feet below us, the Danube, the colour of a squashed caterpillar. Clouds, lying over to the hill like a four-master. The dryness of the air at this height.

I ordered a meal. “I’m not hungry; I’m thirsty,” Mária

said. She did not complain when I gave her more than her share of the veal drenched in peppery cream.

She wanted to impress me with her reasonableness—in comparison with her brother and husband. I didn't ask her, but she swore she was not a Nazi.

"You can call yourself anything you like," I said. "I don't care for Nazis, because I have an unfortunate prejudice in favour of civilisation. Unfortunate, since the idea is clearly out of date."

She ignored my bad manners. "You can't prevent Europe becoming Nazi," she said calmly. "Everything is being altered by it—even the English. To save your face you'll give it some other name. Just as the French will, to save their conceit."

"When the cells in our bodies alter, and corrode their neighbours, it's called cancer."

She made another attempt to impress me—or was she sincere?

"The sad thing, my friend, is that there are no ideals in the Hungarian Nazi party. For young Germans it is a faith. Our young men want to kick the Jews out. They want money. They're not workers; they want an easy life."

I admired her body in a closely fitted linen coat and skirt. She was robust and thin. Noticing that I was not listening to her, she gave up trying to seem a nobler character than her brother. She smiled, delicately and greedily. There was something ambiguous, something cold and mocking, in the expression of her eyes.

I must seem clumsy to her. I can never see myself. It is a fault of my upbringing. My mother told me so many times, and with such authority, that I was a laughing-stock, I ended by believing her. I know the wrong side of my

character. I am jealous, grasping—I, who waste my money and have only debts to go to bed with—violent, untruthful, unreliable. Lazy—I work like a dog or a peasant. I give to people so that they will remove themselves and not trouble me. How many people know me? Only one—a woman—a slut as I am a natural liar. I have friends who speak all the kind things to me in the world—but they are not speaking of the same man. There are the others who have never thought anything good of me. But who knows the greedy violent peasant I am?

Early storms, with a few miracles of sunlight. My first crops were all of spoiled fruit. Now that I am teaching myself a new husbandry, it is surely too late? I blind myself at the sun, I turn a blind mouth to the breasts of the sun, but I have a mortal disease. Cell by cell, time is growing in me.

This is extremely moving, is it not?

Mária asked me for the fifth time to fill her glass. She became simple and friendly.

"I don't like the Germans any better than you do," she said trustfully. "They're really impossible. Last year we had a German woman staying with us. She is a writer. She is a crazy Nazi and adores Hitler. She does endless Party work, writes novels, and slaves for her family. She showed me a new sort of glue with which she mends her own and her children's and husband's stockings. The greatest invention of the age, she called it. Fancy! She never touches face cream or powder. In fact, she's marvellous and a perfect fright. I couldn't endure such a life. I hope we shall never sink to it. . . . And they're brutes. I knew that when I was three years old. It was during the war. . . . We were

living on my father's estate in Upper Hungary. The country your Czech friends robbed us of. We had twenty-eight horses, six of them from Lippiza. My father couldn't bear anyone to touch the Lippiza stallions. He thought far, far more of them than of any human being. We had an English governess who stayed with us through the war. One morning a German officer turned up with his soldiers. Hauptmann von Kheven. He told my father they would stay with us, the whole lot. He looked right through the house and chose three rooms for himself. 'Please choose any others,' my mother said: 'these belong to my two children and their governess.' He yelled at her. 'Clear the English sow and the kids out at once.' My father hated Germans and pretended he couldn't speak German. He said the most insulting things in Hungarian, which my mother translated politely. When our English groom told him that the Hauptmann was using the Lippiza horses my mother had to throw herself on him to make him keep quiet. But what was I telling you? One day I and my brother, who was five, sneaked into his rooms. Fancy! he had a pile as high as the window, of chocolate, tins of sardines, bananas. We used to look at them every day afterwards. He saw us and never gave us a bite! I didn't see a banana after that until 1924, in Budapest. Could any officer except a German have watched hungry children looking at his food and taken no notice? I've detested the Germans ever since."

Smiling into my face, she asked how much longer I was staying in Budapest.

"I must leave tomorrow morning, at eight-thirty."

She was disappointed. "It was scarcely worth coming."

In the cab taking her home, she twisted herself in my arms like a young cat. With closed eyes I breathed in an odour of sandalwood from her skin. I saw the Chinese cabinet in my mother's bedroom, its ebony-lined drawers filled with scraps of silk, photographs, feather wreaths. The excitement with which as a child I buried my nose in the far from languid East, its rivers, quays, curiously masted ships, hemp, wild plum-trees, smoke of burning thorn, rushed into my head through my nostrils. The climate, the sap, of another world turned in her breasts. I lay on them with all my force, until she succeeded in wriggling herself free. Her face was flushed; I had rubbed the powder off the tip of her nose. She was breathless.

"Why go tomorrow?" she asked gently.

Tomorrow I shall feel ashamed of this nonsense. Because I am in love with her at this moment doesn't mean I have the energy for a love-affair. I have not.

In Spain I have seen peasants husband water as if it were drops of a rare wine. They daren't waste it. The life of parched fields depends on it.

Tihaneth came punctually at five. Another man would have kept me hanging about, but his vanities were, all of them, as innocent as a child's.

"Don't let's sit here," he said. "I hope you didn't come to Budapest to sit indoors. When I went to London eight years ago and I saw your famous St Pancras station it reminded me of this hotel. Besides, I have an appointment."

He looked at me with a mysterious smile.

"Shall I tell you what Count Bethlen said to me? He said when he wants to know what everyone in Budapest—not a few people—but everyone—is thinking he asks me to

come and see him." He took my arm to cross in front of a moving tram. "Please be more careful."

"Where is your appointment?"

"Here."

We stopped at a shabby newspaper kiosk. A woman, middle-aged, yellow, looked at us from inside with a face worn down like a knife. Tihaneth glanced at his watch. A grieved look came into his face. "It's much later than I thought."

Poking half his body into the kiosk, he said politely:

"Do you know that dirty little boy who comes here?"

"It's not my son," the woman protested.

"No, your son is smaller and dirtier," Tihaneth said softly. "The boy I mean fetches your copies of the *Magyar-sag*. He asked me for a paper fan, like the one I gave your son. I promised to bring it. Please give it to him when he comes tomorrow."

He handed her the fan, and turned smilingly to me.

"Shall we drink coffee?"

We found a table in one of those embankment cafés shared by Jews and tourists. There were no tourists this summer and their places were filled by Jews. Tihaneth gazed at them with an abstract malice.

"It is so sad," he said quietly, smiling, stirring his coffee, "but I can't help remembering what a French Rabbi said about the German refugee Jews—'Ils sont nos frères, mais ils sont des Boches.' I only like these wealthy Jews when I remember they are in danger."

"Are they seriously in danger?"

He did not raise his eyes. "The Jews in Hungary are done for," he said slowly, softly. "Perhaps Hungary is done for. There is no perhaps for the Jews. They are doomed

certainly. It is only a question of how many months."

I saw in his face that he was hatching out one of his little jokes.

"You've heard there is a Press Control Board, which is going to have a small percentage of Jews. One of my friends, a Christian, said to me, 'Of course you will be on it.' I told him, 'I shall refuse to go.' He asked Why? 'Because,' I said, 'if I take this place I am depriving some other Jew, with a wife and family, of a chance of safety. I will sell bootlaces,' I said, 'and I hope you will have many, many pairs of boots, because I am sure you will buy your bootlaces from me.' To be a poor Jew in a rich city is not a bad thing. 'But,' I went on to say, 'I am afraid you will not have any boots, and I shall not be able to live.' To be a poor Jew in a poor city!"—he lifted his hands in the gesture of a woman holding a child—"They are going to ruin Budapest. All these restrictions on the Jews means ruin—for a simple reason. Only the Jews understand banking and business. Other Hungarians always despised these things. There was no law forbidding Gentiles to be bankers, journalists, business men. What, they chose not to be! Now they've lost their land and they see the rich dirty old Jews, and want to step into their room. Why not? They are not fit for the work. After they have kicked and starved the Jews they will be the death of Hungary. Even if I am half dead of hunger I shall be in pain for it."

He looked at me with the instinctive anguish of a monkey: like a monkey, he had bright sorrowful eyes. I can see him, still unable to live without making his little quips, in one of those squads of victims driven into the concentration camps in which, accomplished mediaevalists, we modern Europeans realise the circles of hell.

"I am luckier than most of my friends," he said, smiling. "I have no wife or family. This is my only fortune now."

His eyes sparkled. "I couldn't speak of my salary from the *Daily Post* as a fortune. They allow me so little that one of my friends said to me, 'Other men keep a ballet dancer or an actress, and you keep the *Daily Post*.' I laughed. I shall laugh again when—and it must happen—I am objective, I shall understand it—the *Daily Post* writes to tell me it must employ a correspondent who is not a Jew."

I glanced at the faces of the Jews gathered, like guests who do not know when to remove themselves, at the other tables. Added one with another they formed a map of Europe with its rivers of uselessly spilled blood, scourges set up in the market-places, the towns hostile and the country yielding a harvest of deaths. A few feet from our feet set comfortably on the terrace, the Danube ran slaver at its edges. I saw that Tihaneth was smiling—no doubt at some joke, not yet polished enough to appear in public.

"Why not come to England at once?" I said. "You have other friends in London. It will be easier for you to find work now than if you come when there are scores of refugees from Hungary."

I hoped he would turn this idea down. There are still too many refugees, although it is made as hard for them to get into England as if England were a raft and Europe going under. It would be less embarrassing to sensitive people if they would die peaceably and dumbly, and not try to escape.

"You are too kind," he answered.

"You will come?"

"No."

"Why not?" If he was sincere in refusing I could urge him with a light heart. "You would be safe in England."

"I am so much a Hungarian—since I am a Jew—I would rather starve in Budapest. That proves how tactless we Jews are."

"But if you were actually in danger?"

His round white cheeks creased with laughter. "How kind you are to think of it."

We strolled on the embankment. A darkness textured like stone spread over the sky, the wings, unyielding and magnified a score of times, of that comic Magyar fowl. Stars sprang on the hill behind Buda. An exquisite freshness came from the river.

"And you ask me to leave it!" Tihaneth said, smiling.

We walked for half an hour in silence.

"I have an appointment," I said at last. "At nine o'clock. I must go back to my hotel first."

"I shall take you there," he said. It was inevitable.

"It's charming of you, but too much trouble."

He did not go through the farce of answering.

When we reached the hotel he asked: "You are going to the same friends?"

"No—yes."

He smiled.

"Where are you going tomorrow, from Budapest?"

"To France."

"Ah." He sighed. "I don't care for the French but I admire them. They refuse to believe they are finished as a great Power. They have become too civilised to be a Power at all, of any size. You are going by the morning train?"

"Yes—alas."

We stood in the ill-lit square, echoing with trams, shouts, the river. Over the door of the hotel a lamp cast lots for the eyes of departing guests. Smiling gratefully, I pressed Tihaneth's hand.

"Goodbye," I said, throwing into my voice the regret I felt for his obstinacy.

"Goodnight." He turned and walked off into the darkness, with a mild jaunty step, pressing his arms closely against the pockets of his top-coat.

The courtyard at the Kakuk is small, and as discreetly lighted as a private room. To be really private you must reserve the balcony: it is completely shut in, with a window looking into the courtyard from an angle that allows guests to see without being seen.

Sándor drew my attention to it. "When my father was a middle-aged married man he engaged it for a month, with a different woman every night."

"How do you get up to it?"

"From inside the house. . . . He's mad. He sold the last Raphael, a portrait of Czarácssy Mária Erzébet as the Madonna, to pay for it."

"Did you object?"

"Object? I? You've seen my father!"

"The whole of that generation is the same," Ferenc grinned. "Every soul in Hungary could be starving and they wouldn't know what to do."

"But look here, half Hungary really is starving," Sándor shouted. "Go into the country and offer a child sweets—he'll think they're marbles. There are hundreds of young Hungarians, doctors, students, lawyers, thankful to address envelopes. If you speak to my father of these things he'll

whistle a song. Bah! We shall kick these old damned fools out of the way."

He began to hum as loudly as a dynamo. The wine-glasses chattered like teeth.

Petőfi took from his pocket a photograph of the Nazi leader, Franz Szálasi. He looked at it with blazing reverence and handed it to me.

"Isn't he in prison?" I said maliciously.

"We'll have him out soon! In a few months—you wait, and see what happens. And then—and then—"

"And then," I said, "you defeat Harrow at cricket."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing. A silly joke. Forgive me. . . . Why don't you begin your reforms at once, before you erase the Czechs?"

"Because, without our country, we are too poor," Sándor said. He knocked his glass against Ferenc's. "To September and the first drop of Czech blood!"

"To the last!" Ferenc laughed.

Behind their eyes, young, implacable, laughing, I saw the maggots recruited on the Somme. Joy cometh in the morning, with omens and chloride of lime.

"The Czechs will fight back," I said.

Sándor shook with laughter. "They'll hands-up when they see us. Look here, you're mad. They're all cowards."

"You can't begin a war in September," I said irritably.

"Why not?" Ferenc said airily. "It won't be a war, it will be an expedition. In two weeks it is over and the Czechs crying out for their lives. My God, don't you know what the German air force is like? In Vienna they dropped thousands of men by parachute, with full equipment, on the Aspern aerodrome. Schuschnigg was arming the Reds

quickly, and the Germans were there first! It will come to the Czechs that way. Piff! Bang!”

“He thinks we’re scoundrels.” Amused and pitiless, Sándor laughed in my face.

“Not at all. You want to destroy because you’re no good for anything else. If the Czechs are not dead in two weeks the French will come in. And then England. Then world war—and *kaput*.”

Ferenc nodded. “And then the Japs and Chinks will move into Europe.”

“We’ll risk it,” Sándor said, smiling. “But, mister, look here, we *must* go after these damned Czechs. This can’t go on.”

This can’t go on.

Tel est du globe entier l'éternel bulletin.

Ferenc stood up. He went over to the gipsies and ordered them to play his favourite song: “Slowly the day goes by.” . . .

Leaning slightly forward, he conducted them with his long delicate hands. An innocent happiness altered his face to become the face of a child holding a kitten.

He began scolding them. “No, no, listen to me. You—you, second violin—you play with too much expression. You ruin it. Country airs must be quick, simple. Think of bare feet in the thick dust of the road—white thick dust. Listen—‘The hour of quiet clouds—’”

He said *thou*.

“Never say *you* to these fellows,” Sándor warned me. “They won’t respect you.” He became sentimental. “A Hungarian wants nothing except gipsy music and a bottle of wine. No money. The Jews started that filthy habit among us.”

Petőfi had come back. "Why doesn't England give Shanghai to the Jews?" he asked, smiling. "Why shouldn't they fight a little for once?"

"There were Jews fighting in the war," I said drily.

Both young men went off into paroxysms of laughter. "What did they do?" Sándor asked, wiping his eyes. "Sell the others their bootlaces?"

"The head of my firm is a Jew," Ferenc sputtered. "He drinks coffee. He pulls the saccharine out of his pocket—so—he has diabetes—then stirs it with his pen. Then—excuse me for telling you—he cleans his ear with the pen. Then he says, 'Yes, yes, did I put sugar in?' and sticks the pen back in the coffee. Then he wipes it on his hair."

"Perhaps his diabetes will kill him before I do," Sándor said. He narrowed his eyes like a cat's. "After Kun ran away thousands of Jews died suddenly and quite unexpectedly. It can happen like that again."

"That Ghetto rat Tihaneth," Ferenc said.

"All in due time," Sándor said in a gentle voice.

We left the Kakuk at two o'clock. Refusing Sándor's offer to drive me, I walk by way of the embankment to my hotel. I remember the calm of Prague. Budapest stinks of death and violence. An invisible other keeps step with me, to my left between the unappeased Danube and its old woman's chuckling gossip, and my hand. What a breath from this river! What an old woman's acid breath. If I lean towards it I shall get in my face such a whiff of memory it will make me uneasy. And why should I feel an anxiety about this month, or this year, or any year? For what mistake as a child am I being punished by these reminders of guilt—too many of them? I should like to take my place

in the world. To be looked up to. To make laws. To understand. Nevertheless, in my way, which is not yours, I am happy. I shall die without having learned how to live as well as Massine used to dance. That was to be expected. The time allowed for rehearsals is wasted over other things.

The main platform of the station was invaded by a score of peasants, women, their faces burned and withered by the sun, hair plaited close to their heads, bare feet. Closing my eyes, I heard the tiny hooves of sheep on a cart-track in Spain. The same odour of poverty, of the sun on the bones of a land and a people.

Each woman, the old as well as the young, carried a bundle of her possessions slung on her back. They were in charge of an elderly man with the face of a jockey. Among them was one child, a boy. His legs—he ran, trying to keep up—were not thicker than a bird's. Anxious, his eyes flinched from the eyes of the passers-by; there was nothing to hold on to.

I dodged across two trains to reach the express from Bucharest. It had all the air of a one-night hotel. Frowsty women edged along the corridor in slippers.

I caught sight of Tihaneth on the platform.

He stood with a blank face lifted to the train. He had not seen me. He was afraid I had lied to him. In one hand he held a bunch of white feathery grass and pinks.

I stepped out of the train and spoke to him. Something sweet and alert came into his face. He screwed his single eyeglass over it and handed me the flowers.

"Why," I said, "did you come at this hour?"

He smiled at me with severe love and said in a soft voice: "We have frightened ourselves yesterday with the idea that

Budapest will be destroyed, or I shall be killed, before you come back. Thinking of it, I came to say goodbye."

"You won't come to England?"

He made a polite sly gesture.

"I hope nothing will happen to Budapest," I said energetically.

"But for me you don't hope—or you can't?" he said with an arch glance.

"I hope everything for you," I said in an affectionate voice.

Three minutes will see the end of it, I thought. And I can support an intimacy for that length of time.

"Did you enjoy your dinner-party last night?"

"Quite well."

"Do I know them, these people?"

"You must write to me if anything happens," I said.

"I am afraid you will miss your train," he said, smiling. "Get in, please."

I felt a profound respect for him, almost love—and relief. As the train hurried me away, my burden of love and respect dropped off. Tihaneth's features became smudged; he was smaller; drawn swiftly backwards, he disappeared.

The feathery rubbish was still in my hand and I dropped it on the rack, meaning to forget it there when I got out.

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